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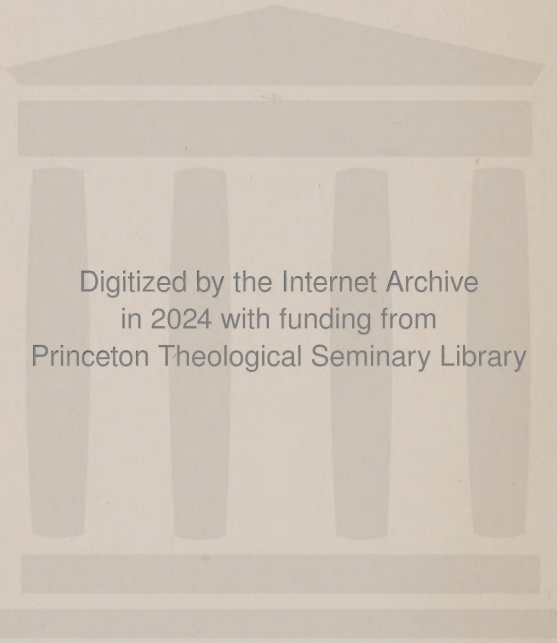
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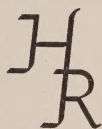
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DEFEAT TRIUMPHANT

by

Lewis Maclachlan, M. A.



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Life is Good

IT IS NOT possible to express the Christian message adequately in words. It is beyond words. It is even beyond deeds. No system of theology or symbolic ritual does justice to it. The Gospel demands for its full and proper presentation the same medium in which it was first given to the world—human personality.

It is necessary to state this plainly so that two mistakes may be avoided. (1) The Gospel does not consist of a body of doctrine. It is not the same thing as the teaching of Jesus, though it is not the Gospel if it is not in complete accordance with that teaching. Nor is it the Church's teaching about Jesus. It is a message which, while we must attempt to put it into words, and can no more refrain from putting it into words than into action, can never find adequate and satisfactory expression in any words, however rapturous or however correct.

(2) At the same time the Gospel is not only the historical record of what Jesus did and suffered. It is an announcement of a state of affairs conditioned and revealed by our Lord's life and death. It is an interpretation of life in the light of those events. It is the disclosure of facts about life which have been made evident in the fact of Christ.

The word "gospel" is itself significant. The English word scarcely bears the meaning of the Greek *evangelion*, which is an authoritative proclamation. The name would be inappropriate to a philosophy or a cult or a code of morals. It denotes a public announcement, not without something exciting and startling in it. It is of course a proclamation of good, and suggests something that the people will be thankful to hear, as prisoners might hear of an amnesty, or one condemned to death of his reprieve.

This joyous proclamation is described throughout the New Testament as the Gospel of the Kingdom. "Kingdom" perhaps suggests an idea slightly different from that of Scripture. It is rather the *Kingship* or *Reign* of God, and the word denotes the fact that God is reigning in His universe. It is quite obvious of course that the present condition of the world does not represent His will or rule. We live in a world in which evil is rampant, a fact recognized in the Johannine phrase "the Prince of this world," for it is a world in which cupidity and fear have usurped a large measure of control. That is because the rule of God is of the gentle, persuasive nature of love, and does not take full effect in the lives of men except by their consent. It is possible to shut God out, and that is what humanity has done. From that part of the universe—a small part, after all—the management of which is entrusted to the human will, the Reign of God has been largely excluded.

But the Gospel declares and demonstrates the fact that God is nevertheless reigning, that there is a divine omnipotent power of absolute good awaiting the acceptance of mankind. There is a sphere in which the will of God is perfectly accomplished. The name given to it in Scripture is "Heaven." This Heaven is not far off, the remote abode of departed spirits,¹ but is the real world of spiritual

¹That would be *Hades*, the Greek equivalent of *Sheol*.

values in which man has his true home. Heaven is the dwelling place of God, and fills His ordered universe in perfect bliss as light fills the day. Life, as God made it and intended it to be, is of this heavenly nature. Man, made in God's likeness, is a heavenly creature. By God's will he partakes of the divine nature and is the manifestation of God's wisdom and power. Only by the exercise of his own proud will has this divine likeness in man been defiled and distorted, and the life of Heaven been reduced to the feverish nightmare of the world.

Now the Gospel of the Kingdom or Reign of God—it is sometimes called the Reign of Heaven—asserts that Heaven is close at hand waiting to break into human life with all its perfect blessedness. It is not something far off either in space or time. It is here as God is here, shut out by human will but ready to rush in at every point at which it is admitted. The faculty by which man can receive this blessedness is that described as "faith," for to believe in it is to have it. Thus the preaching of Christ begins with the appeal "the time is fulfilled, and the Reign of Heaven is at hand: change your minds and believe the Gospel."

What we take into our thoughts we take into our lives. Humanity has been deceived by the worst of all falsehoods, which is self-deception. Man has believed in evil, he has feared evil, thought about evil, gazed in fascination upon evil, and this has resulted in his slavery to evil, as is evident in disease and want and strife and oppression, which according to Jesus are inflicted not by God but by God's "adversary" Satan. But let man change his mentality; let him look up and behold God's Heaven about him, and God's fatherly love yearning over him, and according to his faith it shall be done unto him.

The Gospel narrative beginning with this proclamation goes on to tell how this all-pervasive order of Heaven is in fact invading human life. It manifests itself wherever it is

given admission. It has come in the person of our Lord Himself. It comes in the forgiveness of sinners, the healing of the sick, the feeding of the hungry, the enlightenment of the blind, the release of the oppressed. Like light flooding in it dispels the darkness. Wherever Jesus goes the signs of it are evident. He came that men might have life, and that they might have it abundantly. To as many as received Him to them gave He power to become the Sons of God.¹

Life as God made it is good. He meant it to be good. The evil is of man's creation. But the good awaits the acceptance of his faith. This is the good news. Heaven is about us, and can be in us and we in Heaven. We can begin now to live eternally. The likeness of our Maker in us can be restored. War, want, disease, captivity, are not of God's will, and under His rule do not exist. Man's bondage to evil can be broken and the perfect order of God's love can be established. It waits only to be received by simple faith.

We think wrongly of the Reign of God when we envisage it as something to which mankind attains by its own efforts. It is not the consummation of centuries of struggle, nor is it even "the one far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves." It is the eternal ordered universe of God, the one reality compared with which this evil world is of "such stuff as dreams are made on." To this glory we can awaken now. It is not "lo here! or lo there! for the Kingdom of Heaven is among you."²

This proclamation of the existing Reign of Heaven is the foundation of the Christian Gospel. It finds expression not in word only but in the life and work of Christ, in all that He did and all He was. He Himself is the Gospel, for in Him God has entered human life with saving health. In Him Heaven, whence always came whatever light

¹John 1:12

²Luke 17:21

there was, has broken through like sunshine through the clouds, and become manifest. "And we have seen His glory, glory as of the beloved of the Father, full of grace and truth."¹

It cannot be too strongly emphasized or too often repeated that God in His nature and will is pure and absolute good, and that the life He has appointed for men is by His gracious intention a life in which goodness and mercy shall follow us all our days. The evil is of man's creation, and has its origin in his departure from the divine will and his unresponsiveness to the divine Spirit, Who has never ceased to yearn over him in love. But to return to God in the repentance which is a change of mentality is to return to that Heaven in which and for which man was made in the likeness of his Maker.

This "glorious Gospel of the blessed God" must be hailed by men, we should have thought, with joyous and thankful acceptance. Yet, on the contrary, its very goodness has proved to be the ground of its rejection. It has been condemned without trial as too good to be true. Even the godly, shocked by its generous disregard of small merit and the fine distinctions of the spiritual snob, have mixed it with degrading elements of threats and warnings, and qualified its fatherly assurances with magisterial cautionings. The Pharisees, who in our Lord's lifetime found such sheer goodness as they saw in Him rather improper, have in our day made versions of the Gospel for their own use, with its theology corrected and its morals reduced to conformity with the law. It has even been travestied by fierce announcements of destruction and of wrath to come, which have brought terror to the credulous and no little comfort to the smug preachers who have dared to associate such blasphemies with Christ.

The fact is that light has come into the world, but men

¹John 1:14

love darkness rather than light. As those long used to darkness resent the light that dazzles them, as men inured to bondage fear release, so the world, confronted by deliverance from every evil, shrinks from the pure goodness of God and seeks the shadows. Even bliss is hard to bear when the whole constitution has been heroically adjusted to suffering. So the perfectly and wholly good is regarded as in some sense evil.

On the evangelist of the Reign of Heaven the wisdom of this world casts a supercilious smile, as on one who means well but whose experience is superficial. Heaven is relegated to the sphere of beautiful ideals, not to be confused with the hard realities of life. Perfection is a heresy to be resisted and suppressed, and Christ is crucified as a danger to religion.

II

Life-as-it-is Condemned

THE CONTENT of any message must take its form from the condition of those to whom it is addressed. So the Christian Gospel, proclaiming the Reign of God as the supreme reality, entreats with a world that is predisposed to incredulity. It is a world that is sick and in part knows it, but shuts out the Good Physician. It is a world which is in danger and in great fear, but which will not accept deliverance when it is offered. The message therefore has a ring of urgency. It is something more than a philosophy; it is far more insistent than an education; if it is a "way of life," it is a way to which humanity is called by an arresting gesture to turn from that other way on which it is now groping to its own destruction.

The New Testament use of the word, at any rate, gives it this content. The Christian message is addressed to a world which it finds in a sorry condition. It presupposes doom. So far from being a cheerful assumption that all is well, the Gospel, which on the one hand is a perfect remedy, is on the other a penetrating diagnosis, and comes to the timely succor of a world which is in dire peril. They that are whole need no physician; and no salvation, however glorious, is interesting to those who have no need of it. The Christian message sees humanity,

not advancing in triumphant progress towards a golden age, but trembling on the brink of disaster. So far from offering the reassuring hope that this disaster may prove to be illusory or temporary or transitional to bliss, it regards it as utter and irretrievable ruin, inevitable but for the way of escape of which the Gospel is the proclamation.

Just here we must beware of two equally false corruptions of the Evangel. (1) The fact that it is a message of deliverance from doom has led to its confusion with the unfounded optimism that things are not so bad as was at one time feared. A man faced with imminent death may be saved in either of two ways. At the last moment a remedy may be found for his disease; or the discovery may be made that his condition is not after all so serious as was supposed. In either case he and his friends experience a huge relief. What does it matter whether he has been saved by a new remedy or by a new diagnosis? The fact is that he has been restored from the fear of death to the joy of life. A message that a mistake has been made and that the threat of disaster does not really exist after all, may come indeed as an immense deliverance.

But this is far from being the message of Christian faith. The comfortable conviction that the world is not such a bad place after all, and that man is a fine fellow at heart, is almost the only piece of sentimental nonsense for which support could not be scraped together out of misquoted texts of Scripture. There is no suggestion in the New Testament that if we only leave humanity to itself, and give it a chance, it will muddle through in time. On the contrary, it is made perfectly clear that an unrepentant humanity is in grave danger. It is a danger that can be averted, but unless it is averted by the salvation which is found in Christ, man will inevitably perish.

The Gospel does not pat man on the back with a kindly assurance that he is a very decent soul and doing very

well, and that if he does make mistakes he is doing his best, and anyhow is very sincere. That is the gesture of mild contempt. It damns with faint praise. In the guise of kindness it is the cruelest mockery, for it treats man as a weakling and an imbecile from whom nothing better was to be expected. True love frankly condemns the fall of man from the high destiny to which he was created. It makes no soft excuses such as would only deepen our disgrace. It suffers no pretence. It strips off every unreality and looks at the bare truth. It exposes fearlessly the worst, as only he can afford to do that has at his command the best. Being able to save to the uttermost, to the uttermost it dares to probe. There is no condemnation so dreadful as that of Christ, because there is no salvation so abundant.

(2) At the same time the Gospel must not be mistaken for the announcement of doom. It is the very opposite; it proclaims deliverance from doom. It is the message, not of the Baptist but of Christ, who came not to condemn but to save. The message of Jonah to Nineveh is not the Christian Faith, and those who preach the wrath to come, while they may be dealing with a great and terrible truth, are not preaching the Gospel. The Gospel indeed presupposes disaster; but it is not a message of disaster, but of escape from it.

To regard this impending disaster as either exclusively spiritual or exclusively material, is to mistake the nature of reality. There is no material condition which does not have its spiritual counterpart, nor any spiritual state which is not reflected in material circumstances. The relation of the material to the spiritual is much closer than is usually supposed. Without the spirit the body is dead; without the body the spirit is not manifest.

The Gospel is the announcement of much more than relief from want and oppression, suffering and ignorance; but it is nothing less. It is the offer of salvation which being of the soul and spirit is therefore of the body. It

meets the superficial needs of man by satisfying the most profound. No salvation would be worth the name which dealt, however efficiently, with the mere surface of life; for real as are the material sufferings of humanity, they are symptomatic of an underlying spiritual unrest or disease, from which if mankind cannot be delivered, there can be no cure of the evils which are seen and temporal. The prophetic complaint¹ that "they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly" must not be understood to mean that man's material wants cannot or need not be relieved. The Christian Faith declares that they can. What the prophets observed was that the distressing material needs of humanity can only be met by dealing with the underlying spiritual disorders.

The Christian Faith, far from making light of the unhappy material condition of the world, as seen in social unrest, industrial strife, unemployment, want, famine, war, disease, and all the plagues of modern society, declares that from these evils mankind must and can be freed, but that the only way to this freedom lies through a change of spirit. As soon as this is said many faithless people, who take upon themselves to represent religion, sit back in relief. "Ah, yes," say they, "the Church's business is the realm of spirit. It has no concern with mundane affairs." They feel relieved because they do not believe that work in the realm of the spirit can have any appreciable effect in the world of economics and politics and finance. Their real religion is concerned, not with the redemption of the world, but with keeping the world as nearly as possible as it is. Because of their deep skepticism of spiritual values they can applaud activity in the spiritual sphere, feeling confident that it will have no result in their time.

¹Jer. 8:11

This is the very denial of the Faith that it professes. The Gospel calls for a change of spirit, not because it abandons the material world, but because that is the way to change it. Just because Christianity is a message of salvation to humanity, it is of necessity a message of doom to the evils from which humanity suffers. It is the condemnation of evil in every form.

This change of spirit or mind for which the Gospel calls will soon find expression in changed policies, new legislation, and a reformed order of society. Unless it does so it cannot be a real change of heart. Politics have a habit of taking their color from the theology that precedes them. Social justice in itself is not the chief end of man, but his approach towards it registers his growth in grace. The speedometer does not drive the car, but it is a useful indication of its rate of progress. So Acts of Parliament may be a good record of the effectiveness of acts of worship, and our politics may be the gauge of our religion.

The fact that the Gospel does not deal only with conditions must not be taken to mean that those conditions can remain, or that the Christian Faith is not concerned with their abolition. The foul symptoms of the world's plague must go, but the best way to deal with symptoms is to cure the underlying disease. Perhaps sometimes the symptoms themselves are so distressing that they call for direct treatment. But this is certain; when the disease is cured the crippling symptoms by which it is accompanied, and in which it is manifest, will also disappear. The Christian Faith, which is no mere concordat with the Devil, declares deliverance from material wrongs and sufferings, but it goes to the root of man's trouble and proclaims a cure which is radical and drastic.

It is usual to express this truth by saying that the Gospel is a message of deliverance from "sin." We must be careful not to give the word too mean or pietistic a significance, as though sin were being naughty, or breaking rules, or

defying authority, or even getting into jail—all which the Apostles did regularly. Sin is all that spoils life; it is limitation, spiritual ill-health, failure to live abundantly, as well as just being petty and petulant, selfish and self-pitying. It does not consist in what we do so much as in the attitude of mind therein expressed. It is wrong thought, false belief, tainted desire. Sin is everything that differs from the heavenly will of God, and as this departure from the perfect, divine will is the cause of all evil, to be rescued from sin is to be rescued from all the evil in life.

It is this fact that makes so appropriate to the content of the Gospel the word *redemption*. Redemption means the restoration of something to the use and purpose for which it was made, or the recovery of something from alien possession to that of the right owner, or sometimes the taking up into possession and use on the part of the rightful owner of a property previously purchased. It is in this simple sense that the word is employed in evangelical language. Humanity, having been created with the purpose of its becoming a perfect society, has fallen into the bondage of its disobedience to the divine will, and has become lost to the purposes of its Maker. Redemption is the act or process by which the human race is recovered by God to fulfill His original purpose. It is the restoration of mankind to the fulfillment of God's will, and thus to the dignity and honor for which they were destined in creation.

Before we go on to consider the particular way of salvation which belongs to the Christian Faith, we shall avoid misunderstanding by clearing up some points on which there has been uncertainty.

(1) The redemption of which the Christian Gospel is the proclamation is perfect and complete. It does not propose to make the best of a bad job. It restores to perfection. The Christian message does not speak of the partial restoration of the human race to some approxi-

mation to the divine purpose. It announces the means whereby God's original will for man can be put into effect, not in part but in whole. It declares that the eternal purpose of the divine love can be realized. God's will is for perfection. God's Word speaks not of alleviation but of transformation. Redemption is not a patching up, or a process whereby we make do and mend; it is the complete recovery of man's original and eternal destiny.

(2) Redemption is for the whole of mankind, and not for some part of it only. It is not the selection of a few for salvation, while the rest are abandoned to their fate. This always popular version of the Gospel, infrequently now expressed in words but widely evident in Christian practice, receives no encouragement from the New Testament. The Christian message announces salvation for all who need it, irrespective of merit; and those who have least merit usually have the most need. The universality of the Gospel has always been one of its offensive features, for it is most improper that the scum of the earth should be offered the same terms as the pillars of society; and the alleged joy in Heaven¹ over the elevation of a criminal (perhaps even a war criminal) to equal status with the children of the righteous has often seemed to well-bred people mere unseemly mirth. But scandalous as this may be, there is no doubt that it is the Gospel. Repentance with all its glorious consequences is for "all men everywhere."² "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him."³ "God is no respecter of persons: but *in every nation* he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him."⁴ "He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of *the whole world*."⁵ It is the Gospel which is proclaimed "to every creature which is under heaven."⁶

¹Luke 15:7

²Acts 17:30

³Heb. 7:25

⁴Acts 10:34

⁵I John 2:2

⁶Col. 1:23

No part of humanity is given up as a bad job. There may be reason to doubt whether the whole of humankind will ever avail itself of the redemption thus offered to it, but there is no doubt that the redemption offered is of all and for all. The idea that part of the human race must be written off as hopeless, while a minority is ushered into a dismembered salvation, is sub-Christian.

There is indeed a sense in which we may speak of a selection or election of privileged people whom God chooses out from the rest of mankind. Some doctrine of election has usually and rightly been held by the Church to explain the fact that "many are called, but few are chosen."¹ "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."² But election is not the calling of some that the rest may be damned, but the calling of some that through them the rest should be saved. It is God's way to call some, not because they are more deserving than others, or more valuable or more lovable, but because through them He seeks all. The Church is the instrument which God fashions for His own use. It is the means by which He accomplishes His design of universal salvation.

¹Matt. 22:14

²Matt. 7:14

III

From Fear to Faith

WE HAVE SPOKEN of impending disaster and we must explain what we mean by such a gloomy foreboding, though indeed very little explanation will be necessary to any student of world affairs. This doom is not that which will fall upon the wicked after death. It is the final and engulfing disaster which will inevitably overtake the human race, unless it changes its way of life. Society as at present organized cannot survive. It must change or perish; and if it cannot change it *will* perish. We need not labor this contention. It is now an obvious truth. Even the politicians have begun to proclaim what the theologians have declared for centuries. Now Saul is also among the prophets. And indeed the horror that confronts humanity stands before us so stark and blatant that no great insight is required to see and predict it. Only the morally blind can fail to perceive the lurid glow of wrath to come.

Is this disaster by which the human race is threatened solely physical? Is it disaster only to bodies and material things? If so, then there may still be honorable escape

therefrom. We have only to acquit ourselves valiantly and mercifully, facing the worst with calm confidence in God, and catastrophe, though it may scorch the garment of our flesh, can never hurt our souls.

But the disaster that confronts humanity is not solely physical. It is much worse than that. It is indeed the utter and awful destruction of material things, but that destruction is only the outward sign of the loss and deterioration of spiritual values, of which it is the consequence. If humanity does not change its ways, it must perish, but the real disaster is not in the perishing but in the refusal to change. A traitor may be shot, but his infamy consists not in his execution but in his treachery. Moral disaster exists before the material disaster. Unless something happens to save it, the human race, or that part of it which is at present dominant, will go down in abysmal ruin, and it will go down not in honor but in ignominy. It will go down because of its stupidity, avarice, dishonesty, and spite. It will perish because it deserves to perish, because it is ripe for perishing, because it has already perished in conscience and in heart. Its final and horrible end will be the outward sign of its inner and more horrible corruption.

So far from there being any possibility of valiant and merciful endurance of the oncoming disaster, the disaster is itself the very consequence of man's merciless timidity. Disaster rushes upon the human family because the members of the family are so fear-stricken that they are even afraid of one another, and being in a panic of self-preservation they reject all dictates of mercy and compassion. Being made all of one blood they have betrayed every obligation of kinship, and broken every canon of brotherhood. There can be no honorable death for mankind, for it is precisely through their loss of honor that death is falling upon them. The impending doom lies not in the disintegration of civilization in imbecile strife, but in the

wicked folly and obstinate perversity of mankind that has abused the good gifts of God, turning them from their Maker's purpose as a bond of fellowship, and making them into an occasion for brawling violence. What the Apostle called the "wrath of God"¹ is revealed against man, not in the disruption of the earth, but in that spiritual rottenness of which the physical decay is the extension in space and time.

There is no place here for confidence in God, for the terrible fate which yawns before humanity is the very result of no-confidence in God. Had there been trust in God, there would and could have been no such catastrophe, but God's holy and lovely will would have been perfectly accomplished in a pure and heavenly order of society. The present condition of the world is nothing but the gesture and sign of man's proud rejection of God, by which he has set himself up to be wiser than his Maker, and to prefer his own distracted counsels to the eternal pleading of divine love.

For this reason evangelists have rightly presented the Gospel as no mere escape from a temporal or material disaster, but salvation from a doom which is eternal. The disaster is in the realm not of time but of eternity. It belongs to the moral and spiritual sphere. Lurid imagination, sometimes stumbling over misinterpreted passages of Scripture, has consigned an unrepentant humankind to everlasting flames. But there are of course no more flames in hell than there are harps in Heaven, both being entirely spiritual spheres. It seems necessary for some concretely minded thinkers to furnish the unseen and eternal with the phantasies of this world, just as some people cannot conceive of a mathematical line unless they see it drawn in black on white. Even such prophetic spirits as Mohammed and Swedenborg have thought in

¹Rom. 1:18

terms of the material, and in our own day spiritualists find evidence of the unseen in what they can see and photograph. But Heaven is the abode of God, Who has no form or substance. It is the realm of pure spirit, in which God's will is perfectly accomplished. So hell is the sphere in which God's will is not done at all, and where God is not present. That is to say, it is the most miserable condition conceivable.

It is from this abyss of misery that the Gospel brings the message of salvation. It does not say that there is some faint chance of its being averted, or that if we are all very careful, perhaps after all we can just scrape through. It assures us that all possibility of the disaster can be abolished forever, provided only humanity avails itself of the sole but entirely adequate means of salvation.

The appeal of the Gospel is never to fear. It is a message which, so far from creating fear, dispels fear. The fear exists already in the world, and it is to this fear that the Christian message is addressed. The victims of this world-fear are not conspicuously those who confess that they are afraid. Many who boast and swagger are moved by it. As panic may find expression in a bold and noisy violence, this world-fear is to be heard in much drum thumping and trumpet blaring. Those who know the signs of fear will observe them on every hand. Our policies proclaim it, our legislation betrays it, our very religion conceals it. It is fear that is our chief enemy. We are afraid to love our enemies, and to use God's gifts generously, and to let the truth have its way, and liberty full scope. We are afraid in fact to fulfill the conditions upon which alone we can live in prosperity and peace. The disease of humanity is fear.

It is from this insidious and far-reaching fear that the Gospel delivers us. The Christian Faith has never been a warning of evils to come, but always the announcement of a way of escape from evils which are present. We may

apply this as a test to any gospel to see whether it be genuine and true. If it appeals to fear it is false. If it delivers from fear it is sound. The Christian message needs no intimidation or gloomy foreboding to give it relevance or authority. It points from the terror by which mankind is fascinated to the peace and joy and love of the Creator's purpose, and shows how that eternal purpose of God's love can yet be realized.

The Christian message is a message of joy. Every page of the Gospels rejoices. The Epistles go into raptures. In contrast to the gloom and misery of the world, the Gospel shines out in gladdening light. It is a message of heavenly goodness and bliss. It pleads with man to forsake his dismal brooding upon evil and turn to the goodness of God. It calls on men to change their hearts, their minds, their mentality, and to believe the news which to a worldly skepticism seems too good to be true.

IV

The Weakness of God

BEFORE WE GO ON to inquire what this sole and unique way of salvation is we had better try to dispose of two questions which have arisen out of the foregoing argument.

If the human race is confronted with disaster due to its moral corruption, must we not then confess that God has failed in His attempt to make a good and perfect world? Granted that the moral failure is man's, is it not in effect a failure on God's part also; for if the divine purpose was to make a perfect society, whereas society is perishing by its own fratricide, is not God's will thereby frustrated? Is this possible, or is it not a contradiction in terms to say that the will of the Almighty can be thwarted? And if so, is the impending doom of mankind real, or only the creature of a pious rhetoric, a modern version of hell-fire, designed for the edification of the ignorant and careless, but never to be taken quite literally? Surely there is comfort to be found in the assurance that God cannot allow His own work to fail, but must intervene to save it, if only (as the ancient Hebrews would have said in their bold anthropomorphisms) for the sake of His own reputation?¹

¹Ps. 23:3

To answer this question aright we must consider what is the nature of God, and what are the attributes of omnipotence. If we think of God in terms of worldly might, then we shall see Him as One Who has absolute power to get His own way and to impose His will on His creatures. But this is far from being a Christian conception of God. If God is revealed in Jesus, then we shall look in the divine character for elements of meekness and gentleness. These may not be the only attributes of God, but there will be nothing in God contrary to or inconsistent with these qualities. The omnipotence of God is the omnipotence of love. Worldly wisdom considers power to consist in ability to strike and destroy and impose its will by threats and compulsion. Hence the cry for a strong nation, meaning a nation armed like ruffians. Jesus certainly did not have that kind of strength, nor can we suppose that God has it either. God's strength is moral strength. So far from being irresistible, its special quality is that it can quite easily be resisted. It is resisted by the dullest and stupidest and most depraved of people. It is like the strength of beauty or of truth, which are to some minds very compelling indeed, but on others make no impression. So far from the will of God never being thwarted, it is obstructed and frustrated daily by the weakest and most foolish of His creatures.

The thought seems to be strange even to some Christians that humility and meekness are divine attributes. They rightly emphasize the divine majesty, not perceiving that true majesty consists in humility. Behold the superb dignity of gentleness in the Christ Who is mocked and spat upon by brutal force, and crucified by a relentless coercion which serves the cunning of those who know how to put their policies into execution. To whom do you bow the knee? To the might of Rome in Pilate, or to ecclesiastical authority in Caiaphas, or to the supreme kingliness of Him who "reigns from the Cross"? This is

the Lamb that hath been slain, worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory and blessing!¹ This is the perfect courtesy of love which will not enter until bidden. Behold, He stands at the door and knocks.² It is because He does not compel that He is so compelling. Being servant of all, He is Lord of all.

In the experience of some people, it may be imagined, the most impressive personage is the foreman, or the sergeant-major shouting his orders, enforced by appropriate curses, laying down the law and compelling others to his will by overbearing threats. That being the greatest dignitary they know, they naturally think of God as a very large Foreman or Sergeant-major, issuing His orders with still fiercer curses. Such ideas of God are entirely unworthy of Christian thought, which discerns the divine likeness in One Who, in a moment of exalted consciousness of His God-sent mission, "took a towel and girded himself" for menial service.³ A deep humility is one, at least, of the divine attributes.

When we say that God is omnipotent we mean it in the sense in which love is omnipotent. Love is the supreme power in life, and there is nothing that love cannot do, except that which is inconsistent with love. Love, for instance, cannot impose its will upon anyone. But this is not a limitation of love's power, but the secret of its power. Like beauty and truth, love waits to be received. We can keep love out—for a time, perhaps for a long time—and we can keep God out. Being love He will never force His way in. But let Him enter and He comes in omnipotent.

The failure of humanity to become a true fellowship of men is in a sense the failure of God, yet not so much the failure of God as the failure of humanity to trust Him. If man had let God enter, and permitted Him to have His way, God would have worked infallibly for his perfection.

¹Rev. 5:12

²*Ibid.* 3:20

³John 13:4

Yet in a sense this failure is God's failure, for God is the creator and humanity is His workmanship. If the divine experiment of making a good world goes wrong, it is the Maker who must be responsible, if such a word may be applied to One Who can only be responsible to Himself.

If we are right in believing that God's purpose is a purpose of love in creating a world fellowship of all mankind, we must recognize in this divine purpose a necessary element of hazard, a risk of failure. For in an undertaking of this nature, without the possibility of failure there could be no success. The work of love is to persuade, to win consent. Any attempt to obviate the risk of failure by the use of compulsion would be itself a failure on the part of love. It is precisely because in God failure in love is inconceivable that the possibility of failure in achievement must be recognized. Yet there is no possibility of achievement of this quality unless in complete loyalty to love, and love is always by its very nature adventurous, risking its own failure to achieve its end.

It is interesting to notice that love has power even in its failures, and indeed, its greatest achievement often lies in failure. Thus the Cross, which must symbolize among other truths the failure of our Lord to convince His generation, has been recognized as the seat of His power, as it is the source of our salvation. If the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church, then it is in the apparent failure of Christian witness that its chief power consists.

Our answer to this question, then, must be that God has not failed to make a perfect society, for He has not yet finished His creation. Failure there may be in any particular instance, for failure is one of the means that love uses to attain success. In the short term, to use the now popular phrase, the divine love fails and can afford to fail, for in the long term this risk of failure is the only way in which to ensure complete success. Love suffers defeat for the moment so that it may triumph for all eternity.

Individual or Social Salvation?

THE OTHER QUESTION which we must consider at this stage is one to which rather inadequate answers have often been given. Is salvation offered to individuals, or only to humanity in the mass? If doom threatens all mankind, can particular persons escape from the catastrophe, like Abram out of Sodom and Gomorrah, by their own repentance? Is it possible for those who see the danger, and believe in the deliverance, to leave the sinking wreck while the rest of the human family goes down in horrible extinction?

In thinking this out we must be careful to resist the pressure of our own metaphors. If the analogy of the sinking ship were accurate, then it would be evident that individual salvation would be quite as possible as it would be quite undesirable. If redemption consisted in abandoning the rest of society to its fate while we made good our escape, it would be of poor moral value. Such interpretations of the Evangel are of a piece with the religion that used to set young men out upon the world to find the mark of God's blessing in the success of their own commercial careers, without regard for the commonweal or

too close inspection of the methods by which they did well for themselves at the expense of their brethren. An age which could regard the acquisition of a private fortune as a sign of divine favor naturally clutched at a lifebelt, hoping that the rest of mankind were being saved, but making sure of their own place on the heavenly raft anyhow. A religion that could justify luxurious living for a few economically elect, leaving the rest of society in material misery, was not likely to be offended by the conception of first-class celestial accommodation for the élite, while the vulgar throng were left to suffer in perpetual squalor. How the saints could ever be quite blissful in "glory" while loved ones remained in torments was a problem never satisfactorily solved except by the device of purgatory, which unfortunately was denied to the type of religion that needed it most.

But the figures of speech which have been used to describe the impending doom of mankind are misleading. It must not be overlooked that it is essentially a spiritual doom. The dangers that overshadow humanity are chiefly in the sphere of the unseen and eternal. The acceptance therefore of salvation by the individual does not separate him from the rest of his perishing brethren. On the contrary, in saving ourselves we are acting in the promptest and most efficient manner to save everybody else. Natural law is often reversed in the spiritual world, in which what I take for myself enriches my neighbors, as what I give away enriches myself.

[If, for example, I wish to save the community from ignorance, the best way I can go about it is to enlighten my own mind. If I wish to relieve my neighbors from their sorrow, I must first possess some joy. If I am to have part in saving the world from unrighteousness, I must become in some degree righteous myself.

The message of salvation is therefore addressed to individuals. } Indeed, salvation can be offered to no one else,

for God's workmanship makes no provision for mass production. The message is for all and therefore is for each. It can only be accepted by all with the consent of each. It is universal because it is particular.

In accepting the offer of salvation for themselves, individuals accept it for the whole community. We shall see this more clearly when we come to consider the nature and content of salvation. At present we may look at it like this. The world is in darkness, but every person who accepts the light receives it not for himself only but for his neighbors also. The world is diseased, but everyone who accepts God's saving health is not only delivered himself, but helps to make a healthy world. The Gospel is a message of love, and to accept the offer of love can never be self-seeking, for love makes no appeal to selfishness.

In responding to the Gospel and thus accepting our own salvation, we are therefore contributing to the salvation of the world, and the more fully we accept our own redemption, the greater our contribution to the redemption of mankind. Yet there is a sense in which individual salvation can never be complete without the salvation of humanity as a whole. The more truly we are brought into harmony with the divine will, the more must we yearn for the welfare of the whole world. The Christian Faith is essentially missionary in character and the further we advance in it, the greater must be our concern for the rest of humankind. Thus, individual salvation is never the end or object of the Christian Faith, but only the salvation of all. As the Apostle says: "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."¹

Inasmuch as redemption consists in acceptance of the good and loving will of God for all men, the redeemed

¹Rom. 9:3

soul thus enters into harmony with the divine purpose and shares in that eternal passion by which the divine love yearns over creation. He is caught up into the ceaseless activity of love, becoming one with that compassion for men which was characteristic of our Lord and is an attribute of the divine nature.

VI

The Lamb of God

WE HAVE SPOKEN of the Christian message as the announcement of a particular method or way of redemption, and now we must inquire what that way is.

The best account of it that could be given would be to say that it is the method displayed in Christ. He is the living and true way. He is Himself the content of the Christian Gospel. What cannot adequately be expressed in words finds expression in a life, a personality. "The Word"—which otherwise must have remained beyond comprehension—"was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory."¹ The whole life and death of Jesus is the Gospel, and it is significant that this name is given to the narratives in which the record of His ministry has been preserved.

But we must try to be more explicit in our statement of the Gospel, and to pick out those qualities of character, those characteristic actions, those historical events which most plainly declare and illustrate the way of redemption. This is not to say that we can pick and choose among the

¹John 1:14

incidents of our Lord's life, except in the sense in which the evangelists have already selected the events which to them seemed most relevant to their purpose. We must try to see what manner of man Jesus is, and what were the chief features of His character and career as they have been recorded in the New Testament.

One fact stands out so prominently that it cannot escape our observation. The redeeming quality of our Lord's life, while it may be seen in the whole Gospel narrative, is particularly evident in His passion and death. That this was the opinion of the earliest evangelists is plain from the fact that nearly one half of the whole Gospel according to Mark deals with the last week of our Lord's life, while the more reflective fourth Gospel devotes ten out of twenty-one chapters to events, and associated discourses, which began "six days before the passover"¹ at which Jesus was crucified.

Nor do the Epistles leave us in any doubt that the redemptive power of Christ is particularly evident in His death. The life and teaching of Jesus are in the Pauline writings almost passed over in silence, while emphasis is laid upon the redemptive value of His death on the Cross. Again and again redemption is traced to its source in the crucifixion.² The Johannine letters take the same view, and the Hero of the Apocalypse is the Lamb that has been slain. We shall expect, then, to find the redemptive principle in some quality of our Lord's character which, while exhibited throughout His life, was specially and remarkably evident in His death.

It cannot, of course, be the mere ending of our Lord's life that has redemptive value. Death in itself can save nothing. There must be some special feature in the death of Jesus that gives it redemptive power, and that feature must also be a feature of His whole life.

¹John 12:1

²Rom. 5:8; Gal. 6:14; I Cor. 1:23, 2:2

Now the death of our Lord was a violent death. As the Hebrew idiom expresses it, His death was an instance of "blood," or as we should say, of "bloodshed." The violence that Jesus suffered is so often alluded to in the New Testament that it might be supposed that this is the redemptive quality for which we are looking, and indeed some sorts of evangelical preaching would give this impression, to which a superficial reading of Scripture lends support. Paul says that we are "saved by His blood." John says that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin." Ephesians declares that we "have redemption through His blood." Hebrews finds the way into the holiest "through the blood of Jesus." On such passages of Scripture doctrines of atonement have been constructed on the analogy of primitive sacrifice, and though these have contained some truth, they have largely concealed and often discredited the true conception of Christian redemption.

The fact is that bloodshed in itself is not redemptive. Many millions have suffered bloodshed but they have not thereby saved anything. Indeed, we might trace the present sad plight of humanity to its fatal propensity for bloodshed; or if bloodshed is not the source of the world's misery, it is one of its most terrible manifestations.

The New Testament emphasizes the fact that salvation is to be found, not in *any* bloodshed, but in the bloodshed *of Christ*; that is to say, in bloodshed of a very special kind. It is the bloodshed of One Who died under quite singular conditions. It is the bloodshed of One of peculiar character. It is the "blood of the Lamb," the poured out life of One Who was "led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth."¹

We shall have to look, then, for certain lamblike char-

¹Isa. 53:7

acteristics which are evident in the life and particularly in the sufferings of Jesus. In doing so we cannot fail to notice something remarkable in the application of this epithet "lamb" to One of such an adventurous spirit. It is clear that in some respects our Lord was not in the least like a lamb. There is nothing of timidity or weak compliance in His nature. He was one who drank deep of life, and lived it intensely. He loved nature even in its severer aspects, and in scenes in which His companions were terrified, as on the mountain top and in the storm on the lake, He appeared to be tranquilly at home. He was a man of personal authority, and spoke to His generation with the traditional boldness of the prophets. When He addressed an audience, even while His hearers could not forbear to admire His winsome speech, He never failed to challenge and provoke them. He attracted to the inner circle of His supporters some of the keenest spirits, men who would have had little use for one who lay down passively before the rampant evils of the times. He declared that candidates for His service must be prepared for crucifixion, the grim spectacle of which hideous death must have been a familiar feature of the Galilean landscape. He took the part of the common people with a compassion that made Him share their lot, and cherishing companionship and the social joys as He did, He could yet stand out alone in moral isolation from His fellowmen. He attacked hypocrisy and oppression in high places both by word and deed, and a time came when, deliberately thrusting aside a popular and beneficent career, He set His face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem, the stronghold of the evils which He was determined to challenge on their own ground. This is no "lamb" that we behold marching to conflict with the enemies of all humanity, with the songs of martyr prophets in His heart, and the Zealots and the Sons of Thunder following bewildered in the rear.

It is all the more significant therefore that the contemporaries of our Lord gave Him the title of "the Lamb." There must be something peculiarly appropriate in this name for Jesus, something in His character and in the manner of His death which it is specially fitting to describe.

One such characteristic of our Lord's sufferings is evident in His innocence. "Innocence" in our modern language seems hardly the right word, unless we remember that its traditional theological use denotes His complete deservingness of good. His sufferings were entirely unmerited. This fact had special importance in the Hebrew faith, in which suffering was usually taken as a mark of divine displeasure and judgment. Though this assumption had been vigorously challenged by the later prophets, in the Servant Songs,¹ the book of Job, and several of the Psalms, it is clear that in our Lord's day the belief lingered (as it lingers in the Church even in our own times) that success and prosperity were necessarily indications of God's favor, and failure and suffering tokens and proofs of His condemnation. Even Paul found the shameful death of Jesus a stumbling block, and the claim that One Who had been crucified could be the Saviour was for him, before his conversion, an impudent and blasphemous pretension.

It was necessary, therefore, for the early Church to emphasize our Lord's nobility of character. Here was One Who, while He suffered excessively, suffered in perfect innocence. In this respect He was the "Lamb of God," suffering a fate as undeserved as that of the sacrificial lamb selected for its very perfection.

But this feature of our Lord's passion does not by any means exhaust its redemptive quality. It may be claimed that there is something redemptive in all innocent suffer-

¹Isa. 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12

ing, but many persons have suffered and died innocently (or in varying degrees of innocence) who are not saviors of the world. It is not clear, for instance, that the "slaughter of the innocents" in which the senile Herod slew every male child in Bethlehem and district under two years of age, was of any value to anyone, unless it may have contributed to the moral strength of the movement towards the overthrow of tyranny, and the ultimate abolition of tyrants. The innocence of Jesus may be regarded as a precious element in His redemptive power, but it is evidently not in itself the secret of redemption.

Another feature of our Lord's sufferings closely associated with His innocence, to which allusion is made in the title of "Lamb," is their vicarious nature. Jesus suffered not on account of His own sins but by reason of the sins of others. He died a victim to the fear and greed, the envy and ignorance of Judas, Caiaphas, Pilate, and the people in general. They were the guilty men who ought to have suffered, but instead of them Christ suffered. The early Church was quick to observe that this vicarious quality in our Lord's death fulfilled the ideal of the Servant Songs, in which undeserved afflictions are discerned to have redeeming power; and they did not hesitate to apply to Christ these prophetic poems, of which the original hero may have been the nation or an oppressed minority therein.

Vicarious suffering exemplifies a law of life by which the good do regularly suffer for the bad. Wrongdoers may themselves suffer through their evil-doing, but often others suffer much more than do they themselves; while sometimes, as the seventy-third Psalm observes, the wicked escape the suffering which falls upon their innocent victims. The criminal may suffer for his crime, but not nearly so much as his mother or wife or children or anyone who loves him must suffer on his behalf. This remains part of the perplexing injustice of life, until we see, as did

the later Hebrew prophets, that this principle of vicarious suffering may become a power for the redemption of society.

There is, however, a condition which must be filled. The vicarious suffering must be accepted in a willing spirit, and for love of the person or persons on whose account it is borne. Thus the Servant of the Songs endures contumely and ill-usage uncomplainingly for love of his country. Thus parents will accept and bear shame for their children, or a lover delight to take upon himself the suffering due to one beloved. Any group or congregation of Christian people must of course bear the reproach and disgrace brought upon it by its unworthy members. The attempt to avoid this vicarious shame by excommunication seeks to preserve fellowship by destroying it, but is usually justified only as an amputation.

Vicarious suffering borne in the spirit of love is undoubtedly of high redemptive value, but the emphasis must be laid not upon its vicariousness but upon the love in which it is borne. We all suffer vicariously through the carelessness, stupidity, malice, and ignorance of our neighbors, but usually with resentment and self-pity which deprive our suffering of any moral value it might otherwise have had. The vicarious suffering of Christ is redemptive because of the spirit in which it was endured. Thus the death of our Lord can never be separated from the character which He displayed throughout His life. It is the death *of Christ* which is redemptive, and the Redeemer is the Christ who died.

What then are the special characteristics of the vicarious suffering of Jesus? There are two elements in our Lord's passion, closely associated with His vicarious death, to which may be traced its peculiar redemptive power. These are not the only distinguishing marks of our Lord's sufferings and death. It may be observed that He suffered with great courage, and in great humility, and with a

certain willingness, as of one conscious of fulfilling a high destiny. But these qualities would not in themselves distinguish our Lord's sufferings from those of others who have not proved to be redeemers; nor, though they can be clearly discerned in the Gospel records, are they the qualities upon which the New Testament dwells as of the very essence of the Saviour's passion. There the two elements in our Lord's sufferings which make them redemptive are His defencelessness and His forgivingness.¹

It is the defenceless and forgiving spirit in which our Lord died that makes Calvary the center of the world's salvation. It is this which distinguishes His death from that of multitudes of heroic souls who have laid down their lives in great causes. It is this spirit which imparts a special quality to His vicarious suffering. It cannot be claimed that the death of Jesus is the only instance in all history of defenceless forgiveness. Many martyrs have since given their lives in the same spirit, and the early Church recognized that in dying as He did, Jesus was fulfilling an ideal of ancient prophecy. But the Church has persistently regarded the crucifixion of Jesus as the supreme historic occasion of the outpouring of that forgiving love which, going to the uttermost, at all costs and without reserve, is the secret of redemptive power.

We must now examine more closely this element of defenceless forgiveness which is claimed to be the source of redemption. It will be convenient to consider first the forgivingness of Jesus, and then to see how His forgivingness necessitated or was made effective by His defencelessness.

¹Forgiveness must be received as well as given. If the word "forgiveness" is used to denote the completed act in which pardon is both given and received, we may use "forgivingness" to mean the persistent will to forgive even the impenitent wrongdoer.

VII

Forgiveness

WE HAVE BEEN LOOKING for some moral quality in the character of our Lord which, while it found supreme expression in His death, was evident also throughout His life. Forgivingness exactly fits these requirements. It cannot be supposed that the very brief records contain all the teaching of Jesus. But we may be assured that the chief themes of His teachings were preserved, and of these His definite and repeated instructions about forgiveness are among the most striking. We may consider this teaching under four heads: (1) direct teaching on forgiveness; (2) parables which illustrate or enforce that teaching; (3) incidents (exclusive of our Lord's death) which throw further light on the power of forgiveness as taught by Jesus; and to this must be added (4) reflections of our Lord's teaching on this subject to be found in the other parts of the New Testament.

I

There are six main passages in which the direct teaching of Jesus on forgiveness is recorded. We take them in the order in which they appear in the Gospel according to Matthew.

(a) The Lord's Prayer. (Matt. 6:12, 14-15;
cf. Luke 11:4)

In the Lord's Prayer Jesus teaches the disciples to ask for God's forgiveness of sins on the ground that they have forgiven the wrongs done them by others. This seems to be the only condition attached to God's forgiveness, that the recipient of forgiveness should also be the giver of it. It is a condition not arbitrarily imposed, as though God would treat us according to our deserts, or as though His goodness could not exceed ours, but inherent in the nature of forgiveness. If I do not forgive the wrongs done me by my neighbor, that shows that I believe there is a better way of dealing with wrongs, and I will therefore of necessity expect God to use the better way in dealing with my own sins. Forgiveness is received by faith, but if I do not have faith in forgiveness I cannot receive it, and therefore cannot be forgiven. We must notice here two things to which we shall return: first, the close relation which exists between divine and human forgiveness; and second, the distinction which must be made between the willingness to forgive and willingness to be forgiven, both of which are necessary to a complete act of forgiveness.

That a petition for forgiveness finds a place in this model prayer indicates that in our Lord's view forgiveness is something essential to man's well-being, as urgently and regularly necessary as his daily bread or protection from evil. In Aramaic the same word is used to mean both *sin* and *debt*, and it is significant that in the Matthean version the word "debt" is used. This figure of speech suggests that just as a debt can be wiped out by a cancellation so that it no longer exists, either in fact or consequence, so sin can be treated in the same way, and is abolished by being forgiven.

(b) The Unpardonable Sin. (Matt. 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-29; cf. Luke 12:10)

The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not a particular act of sin but a sinful state of soul, and is usually interpreted to mean the self-deception of insincerity which, even when it is confronted with the truth, refuses to acknowledge it. The point here is that this sort of sin is an exception to the otherwise universal rule that all sin can be dealt with effectively by forgiveness. God, being in His nature Love, can be shut out of the lives of His own children. His grace can be refused, His will resisted. That is always so. Even the forgivingness of God can be repulsed and flouted. But this refusal on the part of the sinner to accept it, is the only factor that can qualify the law of life by which God treats sin with forgiveness.

(c) Treatment of an Offending Brother. (Matt. 18:15-22; Luke 17:3-4)

The point in this passage is that Christian forgiveness is infinite. It does not mean that we let the delinquent off the first time with a warning that retribution will be all the more severe the second time. It does not mean saving up punishment until it is so richly deserved that its infliction can provide a greater gratification to those who impose it. The Christian forgives on every possible occasion, as often as the opportunity offers. If there is a reminiscence of Genesis 4:24 in the "seventy times seven," it would suggest that, just as the savage Lamech boasted of exacting infinite vengeance, so a Christian should be ambitious of achieving infinite forgiveness.

But forgiveness, though infinite, is not to be casual. It may be repeated many times a day, but it is a definite act and not a vague disposition. It is not the mere overlooking of faults or pretending not to see them. If thy brother

sin against thee, go show him his fault between thee and him alone. That will prevent the offended party's nursing a grievance in a more or less sulky silence. Many misunderstandings and offences could be cleared up if there were more frankness between neighbors. It also gives the offender private opportunity of reconciliation.

But if the offender should refuse to be reconciled, so important is reconciliation in a Christian society, that another attempt must be made to obtain it; this time in the presence of witnesses, not of the wrong that has been done, but witnesses to (and it may be supposed helpers towards) the offer of reconciliation. Some degree of privacy is thus retained while the matter is carried beyond the possibility of misconstruction. So far from forgiveness consisting of condonation of the wrong done, or good-natured disregard of it, it amounts to a regular ceremony, care being taken to establish correct procedure and genuine good will.

If, even after this deliberate and almost formal approach, the offender still refuses to be reconciled, a third attempt must be made in bringing the matter before the whole local membership. If the offending brother is still obdurate and refuses to become a party to a reconciliation, then so essential, we repeat, is reconciliation to the Christian society, that he can no longer be regarded as a member of it. One cannot refuse reconciliation and remain a Christian. This may sound severe, but the Christian Faith has nothing sentimental about it, and recognizes the plain fact. The person who refuses to be reconciled is simply not a Christian, and nothing but harm can come of pretending that he is. He must henceforth be regarded as an outsider, just as the synagogues regarded the "gentile and publican." It does not follow, of course, that he is to be treated with contempt and hatred, but rather with the special care and consideration which our Lord habitually showed towards such outcasts.

We shall include verse 18 of chapter 18 under consideration of the Keys of the Kingdom, but first let us look at

(d) The Gift at the Altar. (Matt. 5:22-24)

Here reconciliation is given priority even over worship, a faculty which itself was certainly not neglected by our Lord. It should be observed that the injunction to seek reconciliation with man, before presuming to offer a gift to God, applies not only to cases in which the worshipper cherishes resentment against a neighbor. The importance of getting rid of such resentment is insisted on in Mark 11:25 and in Matthew 6:14, as we have seen. Here the worshipper who in the act of offering recalls that anybody has anything against him, is bidden to suspend his worship while he seeks reconciliation. This teaching is quite impracticable in the Church today, as it would put a stop to almost all public worship.

(e) Turning the Other Cheek. (Matt. 5:38-48; Luke 6:27-36)

Here, though the word forgiveness is not used, the spirit of forgiveness is plainly enjoined. If we are to be children of God, with the right to address God as Father, then we must show in our attitude towards enemies and persecutors the same forgiving spirit which is characteristic of the divine Providence, caring as it does for the evil and unjust equally with the just and good, regarding his need and not his merit. This passage observes that failure to exercise this love towards enemies is to sink to the moral mediocrity of the world. Anybody can love those that love him. It is only the love that forgives enmity which is distinctively Christian.

(f) The Keys of the Kingdom.

It will be observed that the power of the Keys is associated with forgiveness, for though the saying in Matthew is first inserted in another context at 16:19, it is repeated in 18:18. John 20:23 is another statement of the same principle, significantly associated with the reception of the Spirit of Christ.

There is no justification for narrowly interpreting either passage as conveying authority of absolution or excommunication to ecclesiastical courts and officials (none of which existed when the words were first spoken). It would be very curious if to receive the spirit of Christ were to make one act like an official. What we have here is the statement of a law of the spiritual world by which forgiveness abolishes sin, and the withholding of forgiveness retains sin. Far from conferring an authority the words point to a fact of life. When we forgive those who have wronged us, the wrong is abolished; but when we do not forgive, the wrong remains, poisoning our personal, and it may be our domestic or social, life.

When we forgive, it is the divine forgiveness that is active in our forgiveness; when we refuse to forgive, the effect is to obstruct the divine forgiveness and render it inoperative. When man fails to forgive, God's merciful and redeeming power is (in some degree if not wholly) thwarted and frustrated. On the other hand, when man forgives he thereby puts into action not merely a good will of his own, but the redemptive power of God.

Of the parables which teach forgiveness, two may be picked out for their clear testimony to the mind of Christ.

(a) The Two Debtors. (Matt. 18:23-25)

A parable is not of course a perfect analogy, and the treatment of the defaulting official by the king in this story is no indication of the divine treatment of defaulters. A parable is a picture of life, a story which calls for a verdict on the part of the hearer. In this instance the only possible verdict is that the man who had been forgiven the great debt, and so saved from ruin, was under obligation to cancel all lesser debts to himself. The inference is that man, having been forgiven so much by God, is acting with intolerable meanness when he withholds, on any pretext whatever, forgiveness from his fellow men.

(b) The Prodigal Son. (Luke 15:11-32)

It was not, of course, fair or just that the prodigal should be received with such generous disregard of his deserts. The elder brother was quite right from his point of view, that of the good man who sees in leniency to delinquents the danger of depreciation of his own virtues. But again the story calls for a verdict, and it is plain that no other ending to the story would be satisfactory. This is just what any good father would do, and it is just what the situation demands. The point is that life requires forgiveness, for it is full of situations in which nothing else will work.

3

We must now consider incidents in our Lord's life which show His own practice of forgiveness, and throw further light on His teaching concerning it.

(a) The Healing of the Paralytic. (Matt. 9:2-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:18-26)

This incident, recorded at some length by all the three synoptics, seems to show that (1) forgiveness can abolish both sin and its consequences; (2) forgiveness is to be exercised by man, the divine forgiveness taking effect in the human. It will be observed that forgiveness here is not the remission of a wrong to the wrongdoer by the person who has received the injury, but the declaration of a principle of forgiveness, as part of God's ordered universe, which when it is grasped by faith has the effect of releasing the victim of sin, alike from its guilt and its effects.

Our Lord suggests that to say: "Your sins are forgiven," is the equivalent of saying: "Now you are healed and can rise and walk." It would be precarious to build on this incident any theory of the relation between disease and sin, which is far too complex to allow us to suppose a causal connection between the sin of an invalid and his illness. But much illness is either caused or perpetuated by maladjustment of persons to life; and this was no doubt one of the many cases in which crippling bodily inhibition is the consequence of unforgiven sin, so that the effect of forgiveness was to deliver the sufferer from his infirmity. There is here asserted a law of life that sin, with all its pernicious effects, can be destroyed by the forgiveness of God, mediated through man and received by faith. This passage is widely recognized as one in which "son of man" is not a title of Jesus, but means simply the sons of men or mankind.

(b) Zaccheus. (Luke 19:1-10)

This incident is related so briefly that objection may be made to any deduction from it as to our Lord's treatment of evildoers. The insertion by the evangelist of

verse 10 shows at any rate that the narrative was considered by him to be illustrative of the redemptive method of Christ.

Zaccheus belonged to a much-hated class—the *publicani*—usually bracketed in the Gospels with “sinners” or prostitutes, and almost typical of the worst infamy. Zaccheus was then undoubtedly a sinner, engaged in a nefarious business, at best a collaborationist with his country’s enemies, and at worst an antisocial parasite, sucking a comfortable living out of the sufferings of his people. There is no reason to suppose that he was not otherwise a kindly, good-natured man, with an “interest in religion” evinced in his desire to see a celebrity like Jesus.

The deliberate treatment of this man by Jesus was to honor him with His friendship, and to show him unmistakable signs of kindness and trust. The result was that Zaccheus was so touched that he repented on the spot of his evil practices, though not, as far as the narrative goes, of his wicked trade. It can hardly be doubted that the purpose of the story is to show that our Lord’s treatment of flagrant sinners was one of forgiveness, and that it had the effect of bringing them to (or at least to some degree of) repentance.

(c) The Anointing in the Pharisee’s House. (Luke 7: 36-50)

Another narrative of which the clear intention is to show our Lord’s treatment of sinners is that of his entertainment in the house of Simon, a Pharisee. It appears that this worthy man desired to show Jesus a somewhat patronizing friendship without committing himself too far, so while he invited Him to a meal in his house, he omitted the ceremonial courtesies which were usual in the reception of a distinguished guest. While the party reclined at dinner a woman entered, as she easily could

in an eastern house, without much notice being taken of her, and "standing behind Him weeping, began to wash His feet with tears, and to wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet and anointed them with the ointment." The woman is described as a "sinner," which no doubt means a prostitute. She may have been a notorious character, otherwise it would not be to Simon's credit that he knew or suspected what she was. His pharisaical feelings were shocked by his guest's acceptance of the devoted attentions of so disreputable a person. A conversation ensued in which Jesus, again likening forgiveness to the canceling of debt (if they spoke Aramaic this would be natural), declared that love is engendered by forgiveness, observing that the woman had supplied with sincere feeling the courtesies that might have been dictated by etiquette. Then, pronouncing forgiveness of the woman's sins and so shocking his fellow guests, who felt that the divine prerogative was thus infringed, Jesus declared that her faith had saved her, which can only mean that her acceptance by faith of the forgiveness of her sin had delivered her from its power.

The plain teaching of this incident is that forgiveness has power to transform and renew character even in disreputable persons. Forgiveness is here pronounced to an already penitent sinner, but we are left to infer that her penitence was created by previous gracious dealing with her on the part of Christ.

4

(a) The early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles are content to base the message of the Church on the twofold event of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, an event which is declared to be an act of God, having as its purpose and effect the remission of or doing away with sin. The Cross is proclaimed as God's way of getting rid

of evil, and its power is offered to men on the simple condition of their belief in it.

There is one event, however, the record of which clearly identifies the astonishing power of Christ with forgiveness, and that is the conversion of St. Paul. The dramatic narrative is allowed to speak for itself. Saul of Tarsus, the young student, shocked by the blasphemy that one who had suffered public execution could be in any sense a savior, witnessed the stoning of one of his victims in Stephen, who died with words of forgiveness on his lips. This Christlike martyrdom, the first recorded in the Church, had for the moment no effect on the persecutor except to encourage him in renewed efforts to suppress the heresy. But in due time, on his way to Damascus to prosecute the Christians there, he is himself arrested by an unseen Power, which he recognizes as the living Jesus; and from that moment the chief enemy of the Church is changed into its most active apostle. This is the amazing result of a suffering forgiveness. It is the power of Christ at work in His Church, a power which is released by the forgiving spirit of those who die as Jesus died.

(b) Another incident that throws light on the content of the Gospel in the early Church is that recorded in Acts 8:26-40, where Philip travels with an Ethiopian statesman who is reading the Servant Songs (to which reference has already been made on page 32), and had come to the lines:

He was led as a sheep to the slaughter
And as a lamb before his shearers is dumb
So openeth he not his mouth.
In his humiliation he was robbed of justice,
And as for his contemporaries, who among them cared
That his life was cut off from the earth?¹

¹Cited from Isa. 53:7-8. The Ethiopian read from the Greek version, which translates a text slightly different from that of the extant Hebrew.

The Ethiopian asked the question which many scholars have asked since: "Of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself or of some other?" Philip had not the slightest hesitation in identifying the Servant with Jesus, thus showing that, in the view of the first Christians, the salvation which is found in Christ has its source in his vicarious and defenceless sufferings.

We must be content with a very rapid glance at only a few passages in the Epistles.

(c) In Rom. 5:1-11, the argument is that the death of Jesus was the act of God in which He showed the divine love for the undeserving and impenitent. While we were in a state of enmity towards God, God took steps to reconcile us to Himself. It is the part of the naughty child penitently to seek reconciliation with the good parent whom he has disobeyed and wronged. But in this case it is the divine Father Who, in the humility of Christ, seeks to restore the wayward children to "peace" or reconciliation with Himself. This is forgiveness carried to extremes, and, as verse 7 observes, it far exceeds what the world would consider proper.

(d) In I Cor. 1:17-2:5, though forgiveness is not mentioned by name, the power of God in the crucifixion is declared to consist in those very features of the Cross which seem to worldly wisdom weak and foolish, or as the colloquial speech of our own time might say, "soft."

(e) Passing to II Cor. 5:14-21, we find another description of the reconciling attitude of God to man which implies forgiveness ("not reckoning unto them their trespasses"), though that word is not used. The Cross is again declared to be the act of God whose constraining love in Christ creates a new situation in which estrangement gives place to reconciliation.

(f) A verse in Ephesians (1:7 with the corresponding passage in Col. 1:4) states definitely that redemption con-

sists in forgiveness. Here the death of Jesus is described as the work of God revealing His eternal purpose of love. This purpose is called a *mysterion*, a military metaphor for the secret strategy of high command which is only disclosed by events. In the following chapter this eternal purpose of God, Who is rich in mercy and moved by His great love towards us, is said to be shown in the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

(g) Philippians 2:1-11, the famous *kenosis* passage, finds the secret of redemption in the humility of our Lord, Who took upon Himself the form of a servant and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. This divine humility of Christ consists in His lowly service to undeserving humanity, which is of the essence of forgiveness, though the word is not mentioned. It is this humility of Christ which is the ground of His exaltation. Every knee must bow to One Who took shame and defeat upon Himself on behalf of sinners.

(h) In Col. 3:12-17, a general exhortation to the Church lays emphasis on the Christian duty of forgiveness. "Forgiving each other, if anyone have cause of complaint against any: even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye."

(i) One passage from I Pet. 2 may be noticed for its definite assertion that the redemptive power of Christ's death consists in its being undeserved, vicarious, and non-retaliatory. These qualities are urged upon Christians as an example to be followed. Though the word "forgiveness" is not used, the spirit of forgiveness is clearly indicated in the twenty-third verse, which is another reminiscence of the Servant Songs from Isa. 53. Along with this passage should be read chapter 3:8-18.

(j) I John 1:7-9 declares that the "blood" or death of Jesus "cleanseth us from all sin," and then goes on to attribute that cleansing power to forgiveness. In chapter

4:7-21, we have another passage in which, though forgiveness is not mentioned by name, redemptive power is clearly identified with the forgiving spirit, and that in very impressive language. The theme of the passage is love, which, the writer says, is in the Christian sense not a human or natural characteristic but an attribute of God which is manifested in men, and is particularly evident in the divine action by which God sent His Son to propitiate men, thus reversing the usual process by which repentant sinners seek to propitiate those whom they have offended. It will be observed that the redemptive work of God is associated here not exclusively with the Cross but with the whole Incarnation. It is as the manifestation of love that Jesus is claimed to be the Saviour.

(k) We must not be tempted by the intriguing book Revelation except to notice that, while evidently the product of persecution, it lays emphasis on redemption as the work of "the Lamb" (5:9 ff.). The martyrs win eternal glory by dying the same kind of death as Christ, or to use the very hebraistic metaphor of the original, "they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." It is the lamblike suffering that redeems.

Enough has been said to show that in the mind of the New Testament authors redemption, or the process of turning evil into good, is bound up with forgiveness.

VIII

Exposure of Evil

WE SEE THEN that forgiveness is a prominent feature of our Lord's life and teaching as recorded in the Gospels, and the argument has been advanced that it is this element of forgiveness which gives redemptive power to the vicarious suffering of Christ. We must now inquire how forgiveness is related to suffering, how it is brought to bear upon sin, and how it becomes effective in redemption.

In attempting to analyze the redemptive process we may distinguish three parts or three steps or movements in one complete action. Firstly, there is the exposure or diagnosis of sin; secondly, the endurance of the suffering consequent on this exposure, without self-defence or retaliation; and thirdly, the maintenance of perfect good will towards the sinner in unconditional forgiveness. These three movements are not separable, and it would be wrong to suppose that they must follow invariably in this order. They are three parts of one whole, and each one is present in the other two. It is not as though we exposed sin today, and forgave it tomorrow. In forgiving we expose, and in exposing we forgive, and in both we

remain defenceless; but for the purpose of analysis we treat each separately here.

This redemptive process is often called the way of the Cross, for it is in the Cross—by which of course we mean the whole action of the crucifixion of Christ, including its immediate causes and consequences—that we find the perfect historical instance of redemptive suffering. Here we see in a drama of the most intense human interest: (1) the exposure or reproof of evil by Jesus; then (2) His vicarious and defenceless endurance of suffering consequent upon that exposure; (3) in a spirit of complete forgiveness and nonretaliation. It is convenient to sum up all this in the symbol of “the Cross,” only in using this word in its theological sense we must remember its very profound content.

Forgiveness is a method of dealing with evil with a view to getting rid of it. It is not, as is sometimes supposed, a way of ignoring or overlooking it. It begins, therefore, with a moral diagnosis or exposure of the evil to be dealt with. It might be thought that in this wicked world sin is sufficiently obvious without the necessity for any attention to be drawn to it. Indeed, forgiveness has nothing whatever to do with mere fault-finding, or the unpleasant habit of moral sniffing which delights in the detection of evil, or with the critical malice which finds entertainment in the dissection of human weakness. None of these popular mental exercises has any redemptive value or purpose; they serve only to perpetuate and intensify the evils they relish.

Nevertheless, the redemption of man begins with a clear recognition of the evil to which he has fallen a victim. Without being thus laid bare evil cannot be effectively treated either by forgiveness or in any other way. To cover up the evil and make a pious pretence that it is not there, or merely to turn one's gaze in the other direction as though to avert an intolerable spectacle, or

to take refuge (as we most frequently do) in being shocked by it, is not the treatment of evil, but the absence of treatment. We may well forgive and forget; but merely to forget is to let the rot spread.

This, as St. Paul observed, is the function of moral law—to show up sin. “I had not known sin but by the law.” “Without the law sin was dead.” “The law entered that the offence might abound.” But not the law only, but the Gospel also has this function of exposure. The light that has come into the world has of necessity exposed the darkness. “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”¹

Every good life is in itself a silent and gentle reproof of evil. Love, which is the highest righteousness, does by its very nature reveal the moral tawdriness of all that is unloving. Thus the very nobility of our Lord’s life and teaching, while it excited admiration, also aroused opposition. A timid world disliked and feared Him for His very goodness.

¹John 3:19–20

IX

Did Jesus Use Violence?

JESUS WOULD not have been crucified had He not attacked the evil in the world with prophetic frankness. He was a disturbing element in society because He laid bare its hypocrisy and selfishness. He spoke to the conscience and heart of the people, compelling them to choose between His way of life and theirs.

Our Lord attacked the sin of the world, not in word only but in deed. This He did throughout the whole of His recorded life. His healing ministry was an assault upon the evil forces in life of which humanity is the victim. While he remained on terms of friendship and courtesy with individual Pharisees, He boldly criticized the defects in their religion. At the same time He bore frank testimony against those elements in the nation, some of them represented among His own intimate companions, which looked for relief from the oppression of Roman occupation by violent uprising. The Sadducees, who might be called "collaborationists," felt themselves to be threatened by His outspoken teaching. We shall not understand the "passion" or suffering of Jesus unless we realize that His whole life was a disturbing witness against the social, religious, and political system of His time.

There is one event, however, which all four evangelists record as that in which our Lord very deliberately opposed the evils which were concentrated around the Temple worship in Jerusalem. On entering the city, surrounded by the enthusiastic multitude, whose presence afforded Him at least a temporary protection from the authorities who were anxious to arrest Him, He led the way to the outer court of the Temple, usually known as the Court of the Gentiles, where the market and money exchange, necessitated by the requirements of sacrificial worship, were situated. Here, we are told, "Jesus went into the Temple, and began to cast out those who sold and those who bought in the Temple; and He overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of those who sold doves; and He would not suffer anyone to carry a vessel through the Temple; and He taught, saying to them, Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But ye have made it a den of robbers. And the chief priests and the scribes heard it, and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him, for all the multitude were astonished at His teaching."¹

The sort of action which these words describe, and the motive with which it was undertaken, are left largely to the reader's judgment. But while much is left for the historian and critic to fill in, and a wide margin is left for variety of opinion, some central facts seem to be beyond dispute.

(1) There was no scene of violence, for that would have given the chief priests and scribes the very pretext for His arrest that they wanted. Better still, from their point of view, it would have provoked His arrest by the Temple guard, and so brought Jesus directly into trouble with the Roman authorities. The "whip of small cords," so dear to

¹Mark 11:15-18

those who claim this passage as evidence of the use of coercive force by Christ, is not mentioned at all by the synoptics, and it is quite clearly something improvised from materials lying readily to hand. The natural impression made on the reader is that of Jesus picking up some rushes and using them to drive away the cattle. There is certainly nothing to suggest that the scourge was used to chastize the vendors, though that sense *can* be extracted from the grammar of the passage. In any case, the force used must have been largely moral, if we are to understand that one unarmed man cleared a large area of some hundreds of people who, unless appeal had been made to their conscience, would hardly have given ground without resistance.

It is more probable, however, that our Lord acted in this incident as the leader and inspirer of a popular movement, and that the populace, stirred by His teaching, moved into the Temple court and took possession of it, to the exclusion of the sacrificial market and money exchange. If a nonviolent movement of this kind took place, that would account for the fact that the Temple guard did not interfere, and also for the impotent rage of the chief priests and scribes, who found themselves thwarted in trying to frame a charge on which to have Jesus condemned.

(2) In this action our Lord denounced the commercialization of religion. The market and exchange, so conveniently situated in the outer precincts of the Temple, were undoubtedly a rich source of revenue to the priesthood, but they were also a benefit to worshippers. Much could be said in their defence. That their presence in the outer court of the Temple could be regarded as a sacrilege is improbable. If sacrifices are to be made, worshippers cannot be expected to bring sheep and oxen with them from all parts of the country, still less from overseas. It was proper that they should be able to buy

them on the spot. The capitation fee which was exacted from every worshipper as an offering of atonement might not be paid in foreign currency, for that was forbidden in the law (Exod. 30:13), which was interpreted to mean that the tax must be paid in the ancient coinage of Israel. An exchange was therefore a great convenience, especially to those who came from foreign lands. If the rate of exchange was fixed by the priesthood and so adjusted as to be favorable to the Temple treasury, that could be justified by consideration of the service rendered. Religious institutions have their necessary expenses, and those who use them must expect to pay for them.

This very association of prayer with payment points to part at least of the evil against which our Lord protested. His opposition was to that cultured and dignified avarice by which those who provide essential services for the people fatten themselves upon the needs which they supply. The worshipper coming to the Temple paid not only the cost of his sacrifice, but must contribute to the maintenance of a caste, an authority exalted above himself. The laborer is worthy of his hire, whether he labors at the altar or the bench, but those who served the Temple were no laborers but a hierarchy, an aristocracy living on the labor of the people.

To understand the subtle nature of the social evil which the Temple market represented, one must read Luke 22:25-26, where Jesus denounces the "benefactors." A system which would appear eminently suitable and even sacred to the Sadducees would be an offence to One Who believed that the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve. The very ideal of service varies so much in different communities and different minds that the word has become ambiguous. Perhaps it was always so. For some it means the "white man's burden," the burden of maintaining for oneself a high standard of living at the expense of, and of course for the good of, those who are

permitted or compelled to live at a very much lower standard. There never was a tyrant or dictator who did not believe that he was wearing himself out in the service of his people. Even now the world is inclined to believe that authoritarian government is justified so long as it remains benevolent. For Jesus benevolence was no excuse. Playing at charity is not the same as love.

When Jesus spoke of service He meant it in the sense of John 13, meant it in the simple meaning of the word which describes the action of one who humbles himself before his neighbor so as to help him; of one who assumes the attitude of obedience, and contributes to the welfare of his neighbor in such a way as to honor or benefit him more than he honors or benefits himself. It is not everyone who exercises what we call a "ministry," who serves in this sense. The word is much abused in metaphor. Ministers of religion, ministers of state, civil servants, public servants of all kinds, benefactors as they are, do not always stand for the kind of service of which our Lord is the example.

But we must return from a digression to observe that in the incident of the Temple court our Lord moved into action against the whole organization of society as it then was, and as it still very largely is. We must avoid the exaggeration of denouncing every little bit of bumptiousness as the root of all social injustice. We cannot expect the disciples to attain to the degree of humility which characterized the Master. But in the system by which an exalted and secure ruling class maintain themselves in possession, and the people in subservience, by selling to the public what is rightfully public property, our Lord saw something from which He knew that mankind must be delivered. His attack upon the cattle market and money exchange in the Temple court was a condemnation, not in word only but in emphatic and symbolic deed, of that iniquitous social system in every place and in every

age and in every subtle form in which it may be found.

(3) But if this can be fairly said of our Lord's action, it is not all that may be said of it. The dispersal of the sacrificial market can hardly be interpreted as less than a denunciation of sacrificial worship. It is not surprising that Jesus should have taken action against a kind of religion which the higher prophets had already condemned in such severe terms. It is open to question whether Isaiah and Jeremiah denounced sacrificial worship as such, or only its abuses and hypocrisies. They certainly rejected sacrifice as a substitute for justice and mercy, and declared that the true worship of God must find expression in a just social order and a righteous foreign policy. It has been argued that, given social justice and God-fearing international relations, the prophets would have made no objection to the sacrificial ritual of the Temple, which they only condemned for its inconsistencies with the public policies of the nation. But in the prophetic controversy with regard to sacrifices the whole conception of God and of His relation to man is involved. The issue between prophetic and priestly religion is not merely between different forms of worship, between elaborate ritual and simple prayer, but between two different kinds of God, and therefore two different interpretations of life.

✓ The question is not *how* man approaches God, but *whether* man approaches God, or God approaches man; whether man reconciles God to humanity or God reconciles man to Himself; whether the hindrance to a perfect life lies on the divine side or the human. It is here that the greater prophets joined issue with the current conceptions of religion and life, and it is here that we should expect our Lord to carry His impact upon a sinful world to its consummation.

This protest against sacrificial religion was a protest against a false thought of God that poisons the whole of

life and corrupts all society. The thought of life as a sphere in which the controlling Power must be placated; a sphere in which good can be enjoyed only by the destruction or forfeit of some part of it; in which peace and prosperity can only be secured by abolishing much of both, is the curse that lies upon humanity. This view, that everything in life must be paid for by excessive pains and labors, that joy can be attained only through sorrow, health by concessions to disease, peace by preparation for war, is the cause of that subconscious fear which makes such mischief among men and nations. The good is too good to be true unless heavily taxed; ideals are practicable only in part; no good thing is quite certain although extravagantly insured. Plenty for a few can only be secured at the cost of poverty for many, and the righteousness of some established by the perdition of all others.

How far-reaching is this profound fallacy as to the nature of life can be seen in its effects, which are by no means confined to professedly religious people. False theology invariably leads to false politics, false economics and false sociology, and in attacking a mistaken idea of God, our Lord was striking at the roots of human misery.

This sacrificial view of God does not, as is sometimes claimed, enjoy the saving grace of humility, for it arrogantly puts the emphasis not on God but on man. It assumes the prime importance of man's operations, to the aid of which it summons divine succor. It declares: "I go to market; heaven send me good bargains. I go to war; God help me to victory." The divine is envisaged as properly assisting the human. The will of God is made subservient to the will of man. Sacrifice, and all worship of the kind, seeks not to change man but to change God; to appeal not to conscience but to power. While making a show of repentance in man, its hopes are based in repentance on the part of God.

Against this false religion stands out the prophetic truth that God is good, and the world the sphere of His providence and redemption. Peace and prosperity are gifts to those who will fulfill the simple but essential conditions of obtaining them. The goodness of life is to be received in faith, not striven for in competition with the Devil. The part of man is to listen, to hear what God will say; to behold and see what God will do; to learn to co-operate with the divine purpose, as children may help their father. God's nature is to give, and to forgive; to pour His loving-kindness upon men; to pursue them with goodness and mercy. Infinitely better than man's highest thought He awaits admittance into the affairs of men, and forestalls their prayers by His own pleading.

(4) Some students of the New Testament find in our Lord's expulsion of the sacrificial market from the Court of the Gentiles a declaration of the unity and kinship of all mankind, and the denunciation of national pride and racial exclusiveness. That such a declaration would have been in accord with our Lord's known teaching, and that it would also have aroused the fiercest opposition, are considerations which give support to this view, which on other grounds must remain conjectural. If we take Mark 11:17 to preserve correctly the motive of our Lord's action, then we have evidence of His purpose to assert the universality of true religion, and the equality of all races in the family of God. The text in Mark reads: "Is it not written, My house shall be a place of prayer for all nations. . . ." The last three words, however, are not found in Matthew or Luke, who either did not have them in an earlier version of Mark which they copied, or else omitted them deliberately as irrelevant to the context. It would have been unlike the usual universality of Luke to refrain from continuing the quotation from Isaiah had there been any excuse for doing so.

The view is sometimes taken, however, that Mark here

preserves the original and correct version of our Lord's words. In that case the teaching, which Mark discloses to have been a part of the action, would have claimed the Temple (that is, the Temple proper and not the outer court) as a sanctuary for the worship of all races, and not as a holy place from which all but Jews must be excluded; or would have reclaimed the Court of the Gentiles as a place of prayer for all races, and not as an adjunct to exclusively Jewish worship. We cannot be certain that the "cleansing of the Temple" had in fact this significance, but if it had it is easy to see why it should have excited the deepest fears and most determined opposition of the authorities.

X

Defencelessness

WE HAVE DISTINGUISHED in the way of the Cross three steps which taken together constitute the action by which Christ dealt with evil. The first step is that of witnessing to the right and thus exposing the wrong, and this element in our Lord's redemptive action, while it may be seen in all His life and teaching, has been studied in that incident in which it appears with special prominence, the incident with which the Passion week begins. We must now consider the second step or phase of action, that in which Jesus encountered and endured defencelessly the persecution which the first step had inevitably provoked.

We cannot consider here the motives which combined to intensify the determination of the authorities to get rid of so dangerous a character as Jesus had proved Himself to be. It may be noted that the kindly and devout old men who were chiefly responsible for His execution, probably bore Him no personal hatred. We can imagine that they admired this young man with His quite unique courage and faith, His lively wit and prophetic insight. If only He had consented to co-operate with them, they would say, what a power for good He might have been!

But as He was, He was plainly impossible. Either He had to go or the very foundations of society would go. One had to be realistic. No one valued ideals more than they, but after all somebody had to be practical, and what was all very well for an irresponsible young prophet simply would not do for those who held responsibility in a very delicate situation.

It is not difficult to see how these good men justified their attitude to Jesus. Perhaps it would not be unfair to say that theirs is the prevailing attitude to Christ at the present day, even within the Church. For our Lord's contemporaries there is this excuse, that they were in charge of a very difficult state of affairs such as perhaps can only be understood by those who have lived in an occupied country. Their fears that Jesus would create a disturbance which would give the Roman Government a pretext for further measures of repression were groundless.¹ It was Jesus Himself who was the real danger, as much to the imperialism of the Romans as to the nationalism of the Jews. "If thou let this man go thou art not Caesar's friend," was a true word. All parties in Jewry were aligned with their Roman oppressors in opposition to this new movement which was to turn the world upside down.

The chief priests and the scribes only acted on the instincts of their kind. Civilization as they knew it, religion as they supposed it to be, was in peril. Indeed, the

¹It may be said in excuse of the authorities that our Lord's association and sympathy with the underground resistance movement may easily have been overestimated owing to the presence, within the inner circle of His following, of members of the "Zealot" party. To a nervous Sanhedrin this must have seemed as suspicious as His treatment of "sinners" did to the Pharisees. Of course, Jesus was not going to make any violent disturbances, but if some of His own disciples seem to have expected Him to do so, it is not surprising that the chief priests should have made the same mistake (cf. John 11:48).

ancient liberties of the people, particularly liberty to be solemnly swindled by the ruling class, was endangered. It was better, as Caiaphas saw it, that one man, however good, should die, than that the whole people should perish. The choice forced upon the Sanhedrin was the same terrible necessity for decision that Christ brings into the life of every person and community. Pilate put a sharp point on it when he proposed to hand over Jesus as the prisoner to be released in honor of the Passover festival, thus imposing upon the Jewish leaders the choice between two revolutionaries, the ruffian Barabbas and the defenceless Jesus. With deep regret, but with no hesitation, they chose Barabbas, as governments have done ever since.

To say that Jesus met the retaliation of the authorities in Jerusalem defencelessly may seem to ignore the precautions which He took for His own safety during the days of the Passion week. He made no attempt to escape from the danger which threatened Him, but He did not merely give Himself up to those who plotted for His death. He had work to do, and He took measures to enable Him to accomplish it. Thus He allowed the enthusiasm of the crowds, the loyal devotion of His own friends, together with His own wise planning, to afford Him at least a temporary protection. So successful were these precautions that His enemies might never have dared to lay hands on Him, had they not been able to avail themselves of treachery. When we say that Jesus was defenceless we mean that He refused to save Himself or His cause either by flight or force.

The question may be raised whether our Lord refrained from defending Himself on grounds of principle, or merely because no adequate means of defence were available to Him. In warning the nation against the folly of seeking relief from the yoke of alien government by recourse to armed force, He seems to have had frequently

in mind the suffering to the people that must ensue from inevitable defeat. Resistance where resistance is certain to be crushed ruthlessly and cruelly revenged upon the whole populace, may well be condemned by one who would advocate resistance wherever the means were at hand to make it successful. This question could only be answered by a much more intimate knowledge of the historical situation than the meager records of the Gospels permit us, but there can be no doubt that in the view of the evangelists our Lord deliberately declined to use means of defence which His circumstances offered.

It must be borne in mind that our Lord had a popular following sufficiently formidable to prevent His enemies taking any overt action against Him, and to compel them to resort to the employment of a traitor, and the indecent and probably illegal haste of the midnight trial, the object of which was to hustle Jesus off to execution before the people should realize what had happened. Pious scruples for the observance of the Passover festival were a secondary consideration, reinforcing their main motive and providing a plausible excuse for this unusual acceleration of legal and ecclesiastical machinery. If we are right in supposing that Judas betrayed his Master at least partly out of disappointment over what seemed to him to be a timid or perverse refusal on the part of Jesus to seize power, perhaps a loss of nerve requiring a little extra stimulus to determined action, then it would seem that in the judgment of this astute and cautious disciple the possibilities of successful violent revolution were not absent. The "Zealots" and many others who "trusted that it was he who should have redeemed Israel" must have believed in the probable success of a coup d'état on the part of Jesus.

Frequent allusion in the New Testament to the crucifixion as a sacrifice or offering, a giving of Himself on the part of Jesus, a laying down of His life, do not perhaps

necessarily imply defencelessness, though they suggest it; but there are several incidents in the Passion week which in their present form could only have been recorded by those who believed that our Lord was resolved to forgo defence.

(1) In the upper room where Jesus partook of the last supper with the Twelve it is quite clear that He recognized the presence of a traitor in Judas. Yet He did nothing either to exclude the traitor from fellowship and confidence, or to restrain His treacherous activities. It would have been easy to whisper to the others: "I distrust Judas; see that he does not leave the house." Such a hint would have put Judas, who does not seem to have been overpopular, under effective restraint. Instead of that, our Lord made it known that He suspected a traitor in such terms as only to appeal (unsuccessfully) to Judas' better nature, and by giving him a special mark of friendship, which was also perhaps a secret sign to Judas that his infidelity (hidden from his companions but no doubt betrayed to the scrutiny of love by an unwonted uneasiness of manner) had not escaped His observation, He sent him out with words which, while they might have made a last appeal to the heart and conscience of Judas, permitted him to escape the vengeance of his fellow disciples. In thus permitting Judas to go out into the night on his traitorous business Jesus gave His enemies the opportunity of arresting Him secretly under cover of darkness, and thus deprived Himself of the protection of the crowd.

(2) Another incident which makes even clearer the attitude of Jesus, as it was understood by His contemporaries, is His arrest in Gethsemane. A spirited defence at that moment could probably have frustrated the purpose of the small force which Judas had obtained to effect the capture of His Master. A dozen determined men, taking advantage of the darkness and their knowledge

of the terrain, could surely at least have evaded capture and secured the safety of Jesus in flight. Apparently this was the view of Simon Peter who, as soon as he realized the intentions of the party led by Judas, rushed upon them with a drawn sword. Three of the evangelists state definitely that Jesus rebuked Peter and forbade further hostilities, while Mark records the gentle raillery with which Jesus asked if such a show of force on the part of His opponents were really necessary. The evidence is clear that at this critical juncture our Lord very deliberately declined the use of armed force, although it was readily offered just when it might easily have accomplished His personal safety, and consequently the continuance of the movement which, as far as human wisdom could discern, was scarcely likely to survive His death.

(3) It was not only armed force that Jesus declined to use in defence of Himself and His cause. The evangelists are united again in recording that He refused to defend Himself by speech during the course of His trials, first before the Sanhedrin and later before Pilate. When we consider the power of popular speech which our Lord had at His command, this refusal becomes significant. It may be argued that His condemnation by the Sanhedrin was a foregone conclusion, and that silence was therefore the only dignified attitude that could be taken towards that exclusive and prejudiced audience. But before Pilate, and in response to the pressing invitation of the Procurator, much might have been gained by the charm which Jesus was wont to exercise in public speech. If He had taken Pilate into His confidence, or appealed to the multitude which appears to have been present outside the Praetorium, can it be doubted that our Lord could have turned the tables on His enemies, exposing their hypocrisy and revealing His own innocence of the charges preferred against Him? That He made no such attempt thus to save His own life, or the divine mission to which

He was conscious of being called, indicates His deliberate decision to bear humiliation and defeat Himself rather than to inflict them upon His enemies.

Defencelessness is an essential element in the way of the Cross. This does not mean that love forbids all natural precautions. On the contrary, far from inviting and provoking injury, one who is inspired by love will seek to avert hurt to himself, as much for his neighbors' sake as for his own. It is out of spite that a man exposes himself to the ill will of his neighbor, so as to put his neighbor in the wrong. There is a point up to which we ought to take all due precautions for our safety, and especially to avoid injury which might be done to us by others, not for our sakes but for theirs. Thus our Lord did for a time protect Himself from his enemies by taking precautions, both of secrecy and of bold publicity, by which those who would have done Him injury were prevented from doing so. But there came a point at which He could no longer restrain His enemies from injuring Him. At that point He offered no resistance but let them have their way.

This must always be the part of love, which defends itself for a time, not for its own sake, but for the sake of those who would injure it; but which, if this defence fails, resorts to no other and bears the hurt upon itself rather than hurt others. It is never possible to reduce the action of love to rules, and we cannot lay down a law with which there must be uniform compliance. But the principle on which we act when we "take up the cross" and follow Christ is that we refuse to make an enemy of any man, even although he has taken the part of an enemy towards us. We avoid his malice as long as we can, but when it is no longer possible to avoid it we bear it upon ourselves, returning only good for evil, and refusing to set up any sort of defence which, while it might protect us, would injure him.

It will be observed that our Lord refused defence not

only for Himself but for His cause, although the work which He had begun, and which was still in its immaturity, was of supreme sanctity. It might have been argued that the movement which Jesus led was of such unique importance for the welfare of humanity that its preservation must take precedence of every other consideration. Apparently our Lord believed that the defenceless way of the Cross was the only way in which all that was so precious to Him could be preserved, and the only way by which He could fulfill His divine mission.

It will be seen that the defenceless element in the Cross cannot be dissociated from the good will which maintains throughout the whole action an attitude of forgivingness. This forgivingness is expressed not in word only but in deed. Thus, while it is recorded of our Lord that He prayed for the forgiveness of those who crucified Him, His forgiving spirit is displayed much more impressively in His bearing patiently the persecution of His enemies, even the extreme torture and ignominy of crucifixion, without retaliation or reproach. It was thus that He translated into history the poetic ideal of the Hebrew poet, as quoted in the Epistle:

Who, when he was reviled,
Reviled not again;
When he suffered,
He threatened not;
But committed his cause to Him
Who judgeth righteously.¹

While Jesus prayed "Father forgive them for they know not what they do," His forgiveness consists not so much in words, but in His acceptance of the misrepresentation, injustice, mockery, and malicious triumph of His enemies,

¹I Pet. 2:23

foregoing all self-vindication and revenge. How easy it would have been for Him to do what the chief priests and scribes feared that He would do, and by leading a popular revolt call down the vengeance of Roman imperialism on Jerusalem. The destruction of the Holy City, which was much in His mind during the days of His passion, and which, as He predicted, was to happen in a later generation, might have been precipitated. The choice for Jesus was between His own humiliation and suffering and that of the rulers of the nation who were conspiring against Him. He unhesitatingly chose to suffer Himself rather than bring suffering on His persecutors.

XI

Does the Cross Work?

LET US RECALL the argument of the foregoing chapters. It has been maintained (1) that the human race is in dire peril; (2) that a way to avert that peril has been announced in the Christian Gospel; (3) that this way, demonstrated in the life and death of Jesus Christ, is the way of the Cross; (4) that the redemptive power of the Cross is forgiveness (an act in which three steps were observed, exposure of evil, defencelessness, forgivingness).

The most important aspect of the Cross has not yet been studied, but before we proceed to that let us first try to answer a question that naturally arises at this point. How does the Cross redeem? How does the action of forgiveness take effect so as to remove and abolish evil? With what degree of reality can we say that the Cross turns evil into good?

The remaining pages are an attempt to answer this question, and this chapter should be read along with Chapter XII. It will be convenient, however, to raise the question here, so that what follows may be read in answer to it.

clap
The Christian Gospel is demonstrably true. It is not something which we have to shut our eyes and swallow. It is a truth which we can see and prove for ourselves. It is a matter of faith, which means acting in accordance with what one sees to be true. Faith has the deepest reverence for authority, but it is never the mere acceptance of authority. In the sphere of art or science, to make authority (however imposing and however correct) a substitute for insight would be disastrous. It is equally disastrous in religion. What a man really believes is not what he acknowledges that he ought to believe, or what he imagines all good people do believe, but what he sees for himself to be true.

good
St. Paul said that any sincere person, anyone who was not blinded by "the god of this world," would see the truth of his message for himself. "We commend ourselves," he writes, "to every man's conscience in the sight of God." The Cross then must set forth a truth which any unprejudiced person can see for himself. It is something which makes its own appeal to heart and conscience, as though it said: "Look honestly and see whether this be not so."¹

We are not then interested in any doctrine of the Cross for belief of which we are dependent in the last resort upon external authority. It is the function of authority to reveal to us what we can then see for ourselves, and what then convinces us of its own truth by direct appeal to our own moral judgment.

If we are told, for instance, that disaster to the human race has been averted because Jesus bore upon His own person the whole punishment which all humanity ought to have borne, and that God, Who otherwise would have been obliged to inflict eternal punishment on all humanity, is therefore morally satisfied, so that no one need now be punished, except those who hold this arrangement in con-

¹II Cor. 4:2-3

tempt by their disbelief or ignorance of it, we can only say that there is nothing in such a doctrine which commends it to conscience at all. So far from seeing it for ourselves to be true we should have to suspend our own moral judgment altogether and attempt to believe it for no better reason than that other people had believed it before us. We could only receive it, as the other believers had done, on the authority of the theologians who explained the Cross in this way. Instead of appealing to the intelligence and conscience as evidently true, such a doctrine must seem to anyone familiar with the teaching of Jesus highly improbable and fanciful.

It will be noticed, moreover, that a doctrine of this kind provides an explanation of the removal of the *penalty* for sin. It does not explain how the sin itself can be removed, which is what we want to know most of all. Most historic doctrines of the Cross, or doctrines of the *Atonement* as they are called, have labored to show how God was quite right to forgive man, because the death of Christ had somehow satisfied the moral order. We do not need doctrines, however, to justify the facts, still less to justify God, but to state and interpret the facts as they are. If we are to have a doctrine of atonement at all it must be concerned not to find some obscure reason why God forgives, but to show how forgiveness is effective in abolishing sin.

At the same time it must be acknowledged that, the explanation being less important than the fact, thousands of sincere Christians have found in the Cross deliverance from sin, although the doctrines in which they tried to explain that experience and account for it are quite inadequate or even fallacious.

It is important to emphasize this power of the Cross to destroy the power of sin and thus to transform character, for too often the Cross has been regarded as a device by which sinners, being penitent, can be delivered from the penalty due to sin; and in an age in which that penalty

has faded into unreality, the Cross itself has lost meaning for the modern mind. We must restore the true significance of the Cross as the only way by which in actual fact evil can be changed to good, and the world redeemed.

Without this transformation of character, or newness of life, to use the scriptural phrase, which can only be made possible by a change of heart, there can be no deliverance from evil; but once this transformation has been brought about, when the heart is changed from evil to good, nothing more is left to be desired, except the completion of God's work of grace in the sanctification or making holy of mankind. There remains no satisfaction of the moral law or tribute to the divine majesty to be paid. Salvation means one thing and one thing only, because it is everything, and that is deliverance from sin, or power to cease to do evil and to learn to do well. That is what the Cross does. It does not do anything else because there is nothing else to do.

To make this quite clear let us remember that what humanity needs is a power—it must of course be a moral power—that is a perfectly gentle, unseen spiritual power (such as is the power of beauty and truth), which can remove and abolish sin, and with it all the dire consequences of sin in the community and in the world. We need a power that can change men, not in their outward appearance and conduct only, but in their inner natures, their hearts, their mentality. In other words, we need something to bring men to repentance. A repentant person is one who is changed in mind and heart, so that he now loathes evil and loves good. A man who loves the good for its own sake is a good man and cannot be made better unless by loving the good more and more. A community of such persons would be a good or "saved" community, and could not be made better unless by going on to be more and more of the same kind.

The idea that after a man has attained repentance there is still something to be done to satisfy the moral law has

its source in a false conception of God, as though God (as Father) wished to forgive the sinner, but could not do so because His "position" (as Judge) required Him to be strictly just. The fact is here lost sight of that forgiving love is itself the highest morality, and satisfies the moral law completely as nothing else can do. "Love is the fulfilling of the law," and nothing else can fulfill the law of God, least of all what is called "justice," the attempt (in the absence of most of the evidence) fairly to apportion pain and reward according to desert; an exercise as futile as it is impossible, and one for which the Gospel has no use.

To analyze the moral forces which operate in the Cross to abolish sin would be a task far beyond the scope of this little book, but we may take a glance at the kind of analysis which might be made, and the kind of doctrine of reconciliation or atonement that would follow therefrom.

(1) The Cross is disarming. Instead of putting the culprit on his defence it encourages him rather to confess his fault. Our Lord's treatment of Zaccheus is a classic instance of this moral effect. In our own experience we know that when we encounter an unfriendly accusation or reproach our first impulse is to defend ourselves; whereas the person who treats us as if we were good makes us rather ashamed of ourselves and leads us to an attitude of repentance. If this principle works on a small scale, is there any reason to doubt that it works even more powerfully in a larger sphere?

It is the part of love, and therefore it is the nature of God, to "justify" the sinner, both in the sense of making him just and of pronouncing him to be so. Scholars have disagreed as to whether *dikaioō* means to declare righteous or to make righteous. The answer is that, in the apostolic sense at least, it means both; for God does actually make men righteous by declaring them to be righteous and treating them as if they were righteous. This shocks the pharisee (of which there is a residue in most of us), but it

is nevertheless the way in which the forces of righteousness work. It is well-known how a child constantly pronounced guilty will tend to grow into a really guilty man. "Give a dog a bad name and hang it." But give a man a good name and help him to be good. As one said after a long experience of dealing with delinquents, "it is not those who have faithfully found fault with me who have helped me most to live a good life."

(2) The dynamic of God's sanctifying Spirit operates through the thoughts of man. To dwell upon evil-doing is to project evil upon life. To turn from evil to contemplation of the good, and cherish thoughts of goodness in our minds, is to cleanse and refresh not only our own lives but those of our neighbors. In forgiveness, as we have seen, no attempt is made to ignore or minimize the wrong that has been done. On the contrary, an act of true forgiveness rightly begins with the recognition of the wrong that is forgiven. But in forgiveness we refuse to brood over the sin of the sinner, and instead bring to bear upon it the thought of God's redeeming love. In this process the sin is actually and practically destroyed, and the sinner released from the malignant power of his sin. One of the fine prophetic passages of the Old Testament which foreshadows the teaching of the New declares that God will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will He remember no more.¹ What is not in the mind of God loses its very existence. But the divine forgiveness is put into operation by the forgiveness of men, and our human forgiveness releases the divine power by which sin is abolished. The more we bring the sinner to God in prayer, dwelling not upon his sin but upon God's redeeming love and enabling grace, the more we actually make possible for the sinner a repentant and good life.

(3) The power of vicarious suffering, already touched

¹Jer. 31:34

upon in the foregoing pages, is a fact of life which cannot be ignored or denied. Forgiveness is never easy. The Cross sets forth in dreadful emphasis the truth that forgiveness, while it must be free to the forgiven, is supremely costly to the forgiver. In thus bearing upon ourselves the consequences of sin, and so entering into the fellowship of Christ's suffering, we put into operation the law of life by which vicarious suffering moves the sinner to repentance and enables him to attain to newness of life.

It is by means of such moral forces that the Cross works to save those who respond to its appeal. That many remain unmoved by its gentle and persuasive power is too obvious a fact to require assertion or permit of denial. The very nature of the Cross is such that, in any particular case, to be capable of success, it must also be capable of failure. But there is, we believe, no other way by which the sinner can be brought to a genuine repentance; that is, to hatred of his sin and love of righteousness. If it be objected that life is too short for this slow persuasive method of dealing with evil we can only say that no other method is possible. There are other means of suppressing and intimidating evildoers, but none for converting them. If it is felt that to save the world in this way will take a long time, we can only reflect that God is not short of time. If and because the Cross, representing the eternal patience of God, seems to fail today, that is only because it will win tomorrow. Men can resist the Cross for a long time, but in the end the love of Christ constrains them; until in the final consummation of God's redemptive purpose the apparent weakness of forgiveness is vindicated by the triumph of God's loving wisdom in the ultimate salvation of His world.

XII

The Act of God

✓ **T**HE MOST IMPORTANT thing about the Cross remains to be said, and it is this: the Cross takes its meaning from the fact that it is not the action of men only but of God. The Church sees in the Cross the secret of human salvation because it discerns there not only the historic act of Jesus, but the eternal act of God.

Some readers may feel that at this point we are passing over into the sphere of unreality into which they cannot follow. Hitherto we have been dealing with historical facts and spiritual values. Now it may seem that we are entering the realm of dogmatic theology and unverifiable assertion. Let us try then to make very clear and simple what we mean by the action of God.

In all human experience the action of God may be discerned, but there are some experiences in which, more than in any others, we are conscious of the divine presence and power. While saints and mystics delight in "the practice of the presence of God," all men have special moments of awareness of the sacred, of that "Other" in life which is not of themselves, and which infuses all experience with meaning. Such a moment might be the

thrill of discovery by faithful research of some secret of nature, or a sudden glimpse of beauty, or the hush of awe that falls upon the spirit among great mountains or on the high seas, or the soundless voice that speaks through the physical vibrations of music, or falling in love, or the companionship of a saintly and selfless person, or an act of great heroism, or the confiding love of a little child, or a deliverance from danger.

Not only so, but in the ordinary way of life are there not daily providences in which we are dealing with something more than the human agencies through which the gifts of God are brought to us? In every act of love we may discern the action of the spirit of love, which is the Spirit of God. Many a word of greeting and good cheer comes to us from a Source beyond the unwitting messenger who utters it. In every deep friendship is there not an awareness of a Presence that is more than that of either friend?

When we are witnesses of any fine and noble act of heroism we feel that there is something in it which is more than human. There is a sense of timelessness in such acts. We say that they belong not to time but to eternity. They live in the memory of men, and there is felt to be in them a significance beyond the actual event. They speak to us of something in life which seeks expression, and finds manifestation in the conduct of the person who is inspired so to act. In all good deeds there is something of the unseen and eternal appealing to mankind.

Of such experiences we feel that while they have their own natural explanation, and can be described in terms of material fact, they demand a fuller explanation in terms of the spirit. Falling in love, can be described quite correctly in purely biological terms, but the experience has other aspects, romantic, poetic, spiritual, to ignore which would be to pretend that the most important part of the experience did not exist; whereas everybody knows that it does, though it is not so amenable to the

treatment of exact science as are the physical phenomena.

Enough has been said to show how natural it is to interpret experience as the act of God dealing with the human soul. But we must go further and say that when we discern the action of God in events, this is not merely one permissible way of looking at them, but the only right way. If I have done my neighbor a wrong and he forgives me, refusing to allow the wrong to stand between us and obstruct our friendship, then I have been generously treated by my neighbor. But I have in the same act been generously treated by life and by the Author of life, Who in my neighbor has conveyed the experience of forgiveness to me.

If in such ordinary acts of forgiveness we are right in discerning the forgiveness of God, how much more in the supreme act of Christ's forgiveness of sinners do we see the divine forgiveness in action! It was not only the man Jesus who bore the wrongs of His people on His own person; it was God in Christ who thus revealed His divine character and purpose in bringing to bear on sin the gentle, redeeming power of forgiveness, destroying evil and creating good.

The Christian sees in the crucifixion of Jesus, with all that led up to it and followed it, something more than an event of history. Its historical aspect must always be of the most intense interest, but what gives the crucifixion its chief significance for Christian faith is the fact that in this event God Himself broke through into history and dealt with the evil existing in the world. God in Christ was reconciling the world unto Himself. Here we see the eternal, invisible, personal God intervening to redeem His creation.

When we speak of God's action in the Cross we mean two things, which though not rightly separable we may distinguish, if only to make sure that we do not fall into the error of ignoring either.

(1) The Cross is the revelation of God's nature. It shows us what God is like, and what is His purpose and His character. Far from being the kind of Deity that men are prone to make for themselves out of their highest ideals, He is seen to be quite different from popular ideas of Him, and even from the noblest conceptions of pre-Christian theology. For that matter, He is very unlike the character that much Christian theology has erroneously attributed to Him. Here is a God so holy that His very presence consumes sin and utterly destroys it; One Who, being all-righteous, forgives iniquity and pleads with the sinner; One Who so loves mankind that He pursues men with mercies and pleads with them for their penitence, exhibiting the majesty of His omnipotence in a divine humility of forbearance, and a fatherly service of His children, that is far more moving than any compulsion.

(2) This revelation is itself of the utmost importance, for a false view of God is the greatest danger that any man or nation can incur; whereas the truth about God, being the truth about life, is the most priceless possession. Nevertheless, the Cross is even more than a revelation of God; it is an act of God; it is something God has done. It is God's treatment of human sin at its worst. When the powers of evil combined to crucify Jesus, this was God's way of dealing with them.

In the death of Jesus, then, there is a special and particular act of God in which He forgave the sin of man, thus taking extreme measures for man's repentance and salvation. Christians in all ages have felt that in the Cross not only were the people who actually at the time conspired to crucify Christ forgiven, but inasmuch as their sin was typical and representative of all human sin, the whole of mankind was therefore forgiven.

The tragedy of the Passion is that Jesus was put to death not by scoundrels and assassins but by the kindly and

devout men who reluctantly employed them. The sins that crucified Christ were ordinary timidity, jealousy, complacency, unfaith, indifference, irresponsibility, worldly wisdom, reluctance to change, pride, culpable ignorance, and all the other usual failings of decent religious people, who are responsible still as they were then for so much mischief, and who still employ or cause to be employed on their behalf gangsters and ruffians to put their designs into execution. It is the sin of which such common faults are the symptoms which perpetrated Calvary, and it is the same sin which is forgiven in Calvary. But these are our own sins; these are the weaknesses which we share with all mankind, and of which we cannot plead that we are not guilty (not heinous faults, but their respectable equivalents; the same sin that takes monstrous shape under certain pressures is seen in ordinary civilization in much "nicer" but equally pernicious failings). As many a saint has felt in acute perception of the spiritual causes of Christ's sufferings: "He was crucified by my sin, and it is my sin that is thereby forgiven."

In recognizing the Cross to be the act of God by which He forgives sin, a very important declaration is made. If this is the divine way of dealing with sin, it follows that it is the only right way. To say that this is what God does with sin, is to declare that life is of such sort that the only perfect remedy for sin is forgiveness. The universe is so made, the structure of life is such, that sin can be destroyed by the kind of forgiveness that is active in the Cross, and not otherwise. We can imagine other worlds in which some different provision might have been made for the abolition of sin; but in this real world the only known process by which evil can be overcome and rendered harmless is that of the Cross.

But while the Cross may be recognized as the divine provision for the abolition of evil in the world, are there not instances of excessive evil which call for more drastic

treatment? Within the Christian community, or in a world permeated by Christian teaching, it has been said, the Cross is indisputably the correct method of dealing with sin. But it has been argued that there are situations in which evil of such concentrated intensity and of such overwhelming force confronts us, that something must first be done to obtain or safeguard the conditions in which the Cross can become operative. Forgiveness, it is acknowledged, can and does melt the hearts of sinners, but have not we seen in the experience of recent years evil on so vast a scale and of such abysmal profundity that defenceless forgiveness would be of no effect except to put the whole of Christendom under its devastating power? Is there not an obstinate truth in the prophetic word: "Let favor be shown to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness"?¹

This argument has lately received some measure of support from some of our most trusted theologians, and cannot be dismissed without careful consideration. It appears however to ignore the historic situation in which our Lord was crucified. Jesus did not live in a world of gentler manners and warmer sympathies than our own. All His life He experienced the stress of living in an occupied country, under an oppressive alien and pagan government. Roman rule was better than most, and better than some that exists today, but the ancient world was cruel to a degree to which our modern civilization, even amid the horrors of war, rarely descends. It was a world in which slave labor was accepted as a necessary part of the social order, in which unwanted children were ruthlessly exposed, in which women had no rights, and in which offenders against the law were normally treated with a brutality which would shock even the baser elements in modern life. The appeal of the Cross was not

¹Isa. 26:10

made to a society of lofty ethical standards and a developed sense of moral obligation, but to a world harder and more indifferent to suffering than ours. To suppose that evil was less rampant and less overwhelming in our Lord's day than in our own is simply unhistorical.

Nor does the Gospel declare that the Cross is immediately effective in the hearts of evil men. We have already said that of the men who crucified Jesus few were moved to repentance. The New Testament narrative makes no attempt to conceal the fact that, judged by the wisdom of this world, the Cross was a failure. It dwells rather on the utter defeat and shame which our Lord suffered, and the apparent triumph of the evil forces which united to destroy Him. Nevertheless the Christian sees in the Cross the wisdom and the power of God. It was in the very acceptance of defeat that our Lord triumphed over evil. For the personal defeat that He endured, and the material defeat of His cause, was at the same time a signal and supreme victory for love and forgiveness. Evil might break His body; it could not break His spirit. It could snatch away His life; it could not snatch away His love. So, while the Cross is in one aspect the crushing defeat of Jesus, it is, in another aspect, the utter frustration and defeat of the evil forces which conspired against Him. These did their worst, but they entirely failed to shake His forgiving love. Thus, on Calvary we see evil in its most malignant form utterly undone. The triumph remains with the love of God in Christ.

This victory for love is the victory of the gentle Spirit of God, and is the ground of our hope in the final defeat and destruction of all the evil in the world. What Christ did once on Calvary He can do again in the hearts of those who serve Him, and in the Church which is faithful to Him. When love at its best and hatred at its worst come into conflict, it is love that wins. For the historic triumph of Jesus is the eternal triumph of God.

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